TENDERLOIN (Original Working Title: “Lothario”)

A thesis screenplay in fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting

By
Aaron Louis Korn Warner

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The thesis screenplay of Aaron Warner is approved.

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Professor Scott Sturgeon, Committee Chair

Date

California State University, Northridge
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ABSTRACT

TENDERLOIN (Original Working Title: “Lothario”)

A FEATURE-LENGTH SCREENPLAY

By

Aaron Louis Korn Warner

Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting

Based on the real-life “Pick-Up Artist” and “Men’s Rights Activist” subcultures, *Tenderloin* is a dark, comedo/dramatic exploration of male anger, and latent misogyny in contemporary American culture. Craig Schevel, a divorced father and a self-styled seduction guru, is forced to face the dark underbelly of his trade when he takes on a new protégé; Andrew. The young son of a wealthy political family, Andrew’s sociopathy and dangerously relentless ambition take Craig into dark new territory, forcing Craig to wrestle for control of his empire, as Andrew recruits an ever-expanding clique of devoted, angry young men.
TENDERLOIN

Written by
Aaron Warner
INT. HOLLYWOOD CHOP HOUSE - NIGHT

A western-themed bar/grill turned into a weekend nightclub. Hordes of FEMALE PATRONS in postage-stamp-sized skirts and MALE PATRONS (20s-30s) with gel-slicked hair mingle.

Rotating, multicolored lights flash off hokey cowboy decor, in time to the thumping DANCE MUSIC shaking the room.

A jowled SCHLUB (30s) approaches two petite, chatty female FASHION STUDENTS (20s) at a tall pub table.

A few yards off, CRAIG SCHEVEL (32) looks up from his drink. He's tall, lean, with some designer stubble over a face that's just a bit too angular. Beside him is MATTHEW "BROCK" LENTZ (35), muscular, long-haired, spray-tanned.

Craig watches the Schlub hover near his targets.

CRAIG
Eight o'Clock.

Brock looks.

BROCK
How far you think he's gonna get?

CRAIG
Fat Don Knotts? He's all full of steam. He's not even gonna make A1.

BROCK
Ah shit. He'll shut 'em down for the whole night.

CRAIG
Wait...

They watch between the weaving members of the crowd. The Fashion Students continue their rapid-fire gossip.

TALL FASHION STUDENT
... No, because, I was like, in at 10:06 instead of ten. And she had this snotty-ass tone...

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
Oh God, I hate that!

The Schlub approaches.

SCHLUB
Hey! You girls seem cool. Can I buy you a--
TALL FASHION STUDENT
(venomous)
We’re talking!

The Schlub recoils and storms off.

SCHLUB
Jesus! Fuck it!

Craig watches for him to disappear. They turn back to the girls, effortlessly sliding back into their conversation.

BROCK
Bitch shields are up.

CRAIG
These two? They’re Fashion Institute; they already forgot him.
(beat)
I’m gonna drop Spaceman.

BROCK
Oh dude, fuck Spaceman!

But Craig’s already taken off. Brock sighs, exasperated.

Craig migrates toward the girls, keeping them only in his peripheral vision. He cranes his neck, pretending to look for someone.

CRAIG
(calling)
Major? Hey, Major!

He seems to suddenly notice the girls. He talks to them over his shoulder, as if about to take off at any moment.

CRAIG (CONT’D)
Excuse me, have you seen a tall, built guy? Dark hair, pretty good-looking?
(beat, nonchalant)
Aside from me?

The girls share a look: trepidation and curiosity mixed.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
What’s he wearing?

CRAIG
Uh... He may have been wearing his NASA jacket.

TALL FASHION STUDENT
What, is he an astronaut?

CRAIG
We both are.
He turns and extends his hand.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Sorry. Captain Finesse.

The girls pause, then take turns shaking.

TALL FASHION STUDENT
Captain of what?

CRAIG
Hubble 12. First human landing on Mercury.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
Isn't it super hot there?

CRAIG
I had to wear titanium sunglasses so my eyes wouldn't boil out of my head.

TALL FASHION STUDENT
How would you see?

CRAIG
Oh, that close to the sun, the light vibrates through the metal.

The girls turn towards each other, as if asking for permission to believe him.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
(chuckling)
Are you for real?

Craig holds out his arm.

CRAIG
Touch it. See if your hand goes through.

The Blonde obliges. Their eyes meet and Craig shines his custom, precision-engineered smile. It's playful, doesn't impose too much or too little. It leads, it teases. After a second he swiftly withdraws the arm.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Okay, okay! Don't leave a mark!

TALL FASHION STUDENT
I had no clue we were sending guys to Mercury.

CRAIG
It wasn't on the news? Oh shit...

Brock walks up to Craig, reading his mock-shocked face.
BROCK
Something wrong, Cap'n?

CRAIG
Major Brock, I think I just leaked a classified mission.

BROCK
Oh, God.
(to girls)
Sector 23's gonna have his ass for this. I'll prep a P-38.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
What's a P-38?

CRAIG
Standard-issue memory wipe.

BROCK
A round of shots.

Brock heads for the bar. Craig pulls up a stool.

CRAIG
So, you two work out here?

TALL FASHION STUDENT
Kinda. We're students.

CRAIG
Where at?

TALL FASHION STUDENT
Fashion Institute.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
Fashion Institute.

Craig grins like he just struck gold.

INT. BLONDE'S APARTMENT / BEDROOM - DAWN

Navy blue sky, sun almost rising. Craig's eyes open with a start. He's in a tossed salad of bedsheets next to the soundly-sleeping, totally-dis robed Blonde Fashion Student.

He raises his arm, checks his watch, a flashy digital chronometer. His face contorts, unease washes over him.

He slithers out of the bed and collects his clothes from the floor, his motions dainty, measured, and silent like a tree-climbing snake. He slides his phone out of his pants pocket and writes a text message, recipient: BROCK. It reads:

"Crashed bad. Need pick-up NOW."
Once it's marked SENT, he slips back into his clothes. A sudden RUSTLING comes from the bed, and his eyes whip around. The Blonde rolls over, still asleep. Craig slowly stands and pulls his pants up with him, his belt slides a bit and the hefty, garish buckle THUMPS to the floor. He freezes.

The Blonde rouses, her eyes open.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
(groggy)
What time is it?

CRAIG
Uh... Five-thirty.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
Come back to bed.

He continues dressing, his speech grows awkward, unsure.

CRAIG
I really gotta go.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
It's Saturday. Stay with me.

CRAIG
I would, I just got this big mission debriefing, and--

She lets out a long, loud, exhausted SIGH.

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
God, you must think I'm so stupid...

CRAIG
Huh?

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
Just get the fuck out of here.

CRAIG
I-- I'm sorry--

BLONDE FASHION STUDENT
No, you're not.

She rolls over, turns away from him. She draws herself into a ball and shuts her eyes tight. Craig stares. Gingerly, he lifts his chunky leather boots off the floor and carries them out the door.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS:
The SUN beats down on streets crowded with CORPULENT TOURISTS and STREET PERFORMERS in grimy, awkwardly off-model costumes.

The NEON SIGNS on every tourist-trap attraction and nightclub blink incessantly, dulled by the sandy tones of daylight.

Huge AD POSTERS for alcohol, movies, local plastic surgeons and nearby clubs (some strip) all feature homogenized, FEMALE MODELS with the same practiced sultry gazes, many hanging demurely on the arms of MALE MODELS.

The posters fill the upper story windows of high-rises and billboard frames; the overhanging Word of God, some defaced by gang graffiti.

EXT. SUV ON 101 FREEWAY - DAY

MATTE BLACK paint job, the car slices south, the KNICKERBOCKER and the LOFTS at Hollywood and Vine buildings visible through the passenger window. Brock drives. Craig rides shotgun, sipping his drive-thru coffee.

BROCK
We're gonna be late. 101's gonna be fucked on the way back.

Craig scowls and rubs the fatigue out of his eyes, as the massive neon PATRÓN sign atop the Lofts building FLASHES. He pulls an orange prescription bottle from the center console. He pops a single large tablet and washes it down.

BROCK (CONT'D)
You're getting sloppy, man. You're dropping silly-ass routines, you're popping that shit before you sarge...

CRAIG
You try pulling girls when you walk like Captain Ahab.

BROCK
You wouldn't be limping if you stopped squatting 315. Who're you trying to impress, anyway? No chick gives a shit about your quads.

CRAIG
Just... Cool it. We closed, did we not?

BROCK
Don't you even... I'm not dumb, Craig. You run Spaceman because you hope it won't work. You have the
gayest nickname in the Game, and
you seriously slap Captain in front
of it?

CRAIG
(firm)
Did Scott check us in yet?

BROCK
Yeah. And Duane just got there.

CRAIG
Good. You know, he pulled a decent
nine Latin chick at Azteca.

BROCK
You put a lasso 'round it for him?

Craig shakes his head dismissively, turns back to the
window.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - DAY

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. Brock stands at the sound control
table, barking into a microphone. A lanky kid with curly
hair, SCOTT DESMOND (24) stands next to him, fading up
DRAMATIC, CANNED MUSIC.

BROCK
Gentlemen, please welcome: Master
of the Aphroditic Arts...

A several-hundred-strong all-male AUDIENCE CLAPS.

BROCK (CONT'D)
FINESSE!

Craig emerges from behind a curtain, sweeps into the
spotlight on a makeshift stage, holding his arms out,
Christ-like. The Audience CHEERS; standing ovation.

He's clad in his trademark costume: foil-printed dress
shirt, acid-washed jeans, and those chunky boots that give
him a few extra inches in height.

Atop his head, a garish thin-brimmed fedora with an
intricately-stitched fleur-de-lis design. His voice rings
out loud and proud via his headset mic.

CRAIG
Hello, Fullerton!

The CHEERING builds and BUILDS. Craig motions for his Auds
to sit. As they do, he struts around, owning the stage.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
God, I love you OC guys! I can tell you'd all pull tens your first night in H-Wood.

A collective CHUCKLE rings out. Scott hits a button on a remote, lowering a SCREEN behind Craig, a projector fills it with a photo of a thin manual:

"THE NEW KINGS PLAYBOOK: A Three-Step Procedure to Seduce Any Woman".

CRAIG (CONT'D)
You laugh! But I used to be where you're sitting now. I heard it all: "You're just not my type."
(beat)
"I'm not available right now."
(beat)
Or how about "Oh, you're just too nice!"

Craig rolls his eyes, lets loose an exaggerated GROAN. The Crowd LAUGHS again.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Oh, hey! Show of hands if you heard this one... "I think we're better off just friends."

He makes a "jerk-off" motion with his hand. The Audience goes wild.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I heard everything! I practically had a doctor diagnose me with terminal Blue Balls. Until... I got a message from God.

He smirks coyly, the Audience SNICKERS in anticipation.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I heard the God of Men call down to me and say...
(cartoon "God" voice)
"My Son, I want you, to build an ARC."

Scott hits a button on a laptop set at the tech table. The slide on the screen changes to show the breakdown of Craig's "ARC Theory".

CRAIG (CONT'D)
A. R. C. Approach, Reel, and Close. Your Approach starts before you even go out Sarging. It's how you dress, how you talk, it's the character you play out in the Field...
INT. GYM / WEIGHT ROOM - DAY

Spacious, upscale, and packed. Craig readies himself by a squat rack. Brock stands nearby, admiring himself in the mirror as he hammers through an endless set of bicep curls.

CRAIG (V.O.)
(continuing)
You build that character. You live that character.

Craig slips a red foam SUPPORT SLEEVE over his right knee and takes his place under the barbell. He hauls the bar off the rack by his shoulders, INHALES deeply, and squats, his face already turning red.

INT. GYM / MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Craig SLAMS against the lockers, sweat-drenched, his face flushed and gaunt. He winces as he tugs the support sleeve off his knee.

He tries to put his weight on his right leg, the effort pulls an involuntary MOAN out of him. VEINS bulge and his jaw locks in pain.

CRAIG
(sotto)
Ah, shit--! Shit!

Sliding the sleeve back on, he limps to his locker and pulls the orange prescription bottle from it.

CRAIG (V.O.)
Then, you take that character out and present it.

He pops a tablet and takes slow, deep breaths. He holds his hand over his chest, letting his heartbeat slow.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Craig, now dressed in a polo and jeans stands on the sidewalk island between the parking lot and the front of the campus. His body language is nervous. He's barely recognizable as the costumed club jester we first met.

He watches a gaggle of KINDERGARTNERS playing in their fenced-off section of the school. CALLIE (4) a girl with piercing, intelligent eyes hops around, wearing a backpack in the shape of a turtle shell. Craig perks up at the sight of her.

A burly YARD DUTY (60s) saunters up to him. His tone already brusque.
YARD DUTY
Can I help you?

CUT TO:

EXT. CRAIG'S CAR ON FREEWAY - DAY - TRAVELLING

Black. Leather interior. Immaculately clean. The Hollywood skyline glistens around the windows. Craig's gliding, as if he's too cool for traffic.

He talks to his cell phone, on speaker as it sits in his center console. The voice of TARÁ (30) finishes her voicemail message.

TARA (V.O.)
Hi, you've reached Tara Bradshaw. I'm sorry I missed your call--

CRAIG
(sotto)
Sure you are.

TARA (V.O.)
But if you please give me your name, number, and a brief message, I'll get back to you shortly. Thanks!

A BEEP. Craig barely stifles his ire towards the phone.

CRAIG
So, I got to Callie's new school early, and it turns out they don't have my name. So they can't legally release her to me.
(beat)
This is bullshit, Tara.

He hangs up, fumes. He glances in his rearview mirror at his backseat, a child's car seat goes unoccupied.

CRAIG (V.O.)
It's hard out there. Every move you make, somebody: your girl, your boss, your parents are telling you "Not good enough!" They refuse to see the value in you. Of course you can't see it either...

INT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB / MEN'S RESTROOM - NIGHT

Craig, now in his clubbing garb, makes pointed eye contact with DUANE (44): African American, portly, balancing out a bald spot with a thick Van Dyke. His shoulders, sunken; his gaze, downcast, leaning against the wall.
Notably, Craig's missing his hat, his hair pomade-laden.

CRAIG
(continuing)
But I do. I wouldn't be here if I didn't see something totally great in you, Duane.

Duane sighs.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Don't go dark on me, man.

DUANE
I can't pull in there, man. I got twenty years on everybody in there.

CRAIG
(beat)
What's really going on?

Duane shifts, his hands awkwardly search for his pockets. He's in a meager polo and some slightly-shiny slacks.

DUANE
I think this was a mistake. I should probably just call it a night. I won't ask for a refund or anything...

CRAIG
Duane...

Craig slips out his wallet, printed with a foil dollar sign, and flips out a THICK STACK OF BILLS, he holds it in front of Duane.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Take it. Just please, finish the night.

DUANE
What?

CRAIG
If I was focused on the money, I wouldn't do one-on-ones. I'd just run group workshops and get my regular rate from nine guys at once. I want to see you succeed. You deserve it.

Duane puts his hand up, pushes the money away.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
You don't even have to say it. Jen call you...? The lawyer call you...?

DUANE
Curtis. The lawyer.

CRAIG
Either way, three years, now? She doesn't deserve to steal any more of your time. And you know what? What you have here--

He places a finger dead center of Duane's chest.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Nobody can take away.

Duane takes a long breath, pushes his back off the wall.

DUANE
I lost my set.

CRAIG
That's okay! I got a set still open, and it is cherry. Where's your drink?

DUANE
I finished it.

CRAIG
Okay. You're gonna order for both of us, call me to get my own drink, because you are not my errand boy--I'll do a Cred Intro, merge you in, run a Fake Search as I grab my drink, give you time to hold court--Find another set to merge in, we get some Social Proof running--Bing, Bang, Boom: You Close!

(beat)
And I swear to God, you will feel like a new man tomorrow. I believe in you.

Duane looks at Craig with a combination of amusement and awe.

DUANE
I don't know anybody like you, Fin.

CRAIG
No nom de guerre. As of right now, we're friends. Craig.

He extends his hand to Duane. They shake, Craig patting Duane's shoulder.
CRAIG (CONT'D)
Let's go fishing.

They make for the door, Craig stopping for a mirror-check as they pass the sinks and the proper-looking ATTENDANT (50s). He helps himself to a squirt of mouthwash, and leaves an ample tip in the jar on his way out.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - DAY
Craig now sits next to Duane on-stage, both with their own mics in-hand.

CRAIG
And did you Close?

Duane chuckles, bashful.

DUANE
Few times...

CRAIG
My man! Give it up for Duane, guys!

Craig throws out his hand for the high-five, hauls Duane to his feet and gives him a congratulatory post-game hug. The Audience APPLAUDS and Craig lets Duane take a reluctant bow, then retake his seat in the crowd.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

The Audience Members are now formed in two thick lines in front of a FOLDING TABLE, where sit Craig and Scott. Craig signs autographs and shakes hands with his fans, while Scott sells copies of the "New Kings Playbook" from a hefty stack.

Craig's pleasant, all smiles and encouragement. He bids a devotee goodbye. Next in line is ANDREW WALTIGAN (26). He's pudgy, with unkempt curly hair and wisps for a neck-dwelling beard.

His mouth contorts, crawling into a grin and then suddenly dropping it, as if it's a wholly new exercise.

ANDREW
Hi.

CRAIG
Hey. Who'm I making this out to?

ANDREW
I want to talk to you, Craig.

CRAIG
Woah, gotta buy me dinner before we get that familiar.
Craig chuckles at his own joke. Andrew stays silent.

ANDREW
Uh, I'm Andrew. My dad's Brad Waltigan.

CRAIG
Governor?

ANDREW
Yeah-- well, like, former. I wanna do a one-on-one workshop.

CRAIG
Sure. Application's on the website, I read them all directly, and if I think the one-on-one will suit you...

ANDREW
I know, but I don't wanna wait. Like, name a price.

CRAIG
That's just not how I work.

ANDREW
That's how I work. And I'm the one paying...

Craig smirks, checks over Andrew's shoulder at the line.

CRAIG
We'll talk.

INT. HOTEL CAFE - DAY

Craig carries his order from the coffee bar and joins Andrew at a table. His hat is missing again and he sports a pair of sunglasses, playing incognito.

CRAIG
First, this isn't a cash grab for me. I've helped de-virginate guys, get them over their exes, whatever. But none of them try to run Game on me.

He checks his watch, glances at his cell phone screen.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
So, Cliffs Notes: What do you want out of this? 'Cause I can tell it's not just getting laid.

ANDREW
Well, I wanna do what you do.
CRAIG
You wanna teach Pick-Up?

ANDREW
Yeah. I mean, who wouldn't want to get laid for a living?

Craig cocks his head. Even in talking dour he sounds smooth.

CRAIG
Well, a few reasons: If you're good, you're known. That means you're gonna be hated. Every little Women's Studies chick is gonna try and out you if she sees you at a club. And if--

ANDREW
You ever bang chicks like that?

CRAIG
Not as often as guys like to think.

He sips from his coffee.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Every few months, your current spot's gonna fill with guys aping your style, your lines, and chicks hearing from their girlfriends how you pump-and-dumped them. You're gonna have to keep rotating venues. New clubs open up every week in L.A., but out here...

ANDREW
I got a place in Culver City.

CRAIG
Fair enough. You know, you're young. You're not gonna find a girlfriend doing this. Anyone who wants to go Wifey is gonna be clingy, or wanting to turn you over to Jesus, or she'll be calling you saying she's gonna kill herself if you don't--

ANDREW
Crazy doesn't bother me. I'm half-nuts, myself.

CRAIG
I notice you're interrupting me.

ANDREW
Indirect Neg. Tells the Mark that what you have to say is more important than what they do.

CRAIG
You're all read-up.

Andrew shrugs, shifts in his seat.

ANDREW
I grew up under a Big-Fucking-Deal for a dad, and my brother's just shaping up to be his sequel. I'm done being the runt of the litter. Everybody at school says set your goals, and follow them to the end.

Andrew leans back, but his voice grows stronger.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I'd guess that you're trying to see if you can scare me off. Maybe as a test. But it sounds to me, like you want out as much as I want in.

Craig grips onto his poker face.

CRAIG
Let's see what you got.

INT. NEW KINGS PRESS OFFICES - DAY

Smallish, clearly meant for a company run by three people, but with a lavish budget for decor and furniture. Filled with copies of the Playbook and promo materials.

Scott sits at a computer with Brock making an impassioned phone call behind him. In the...

MEETING ROOM

Craig stands in front of a note-filled whiteboard. Andrew sits taking his own notes on a legal pad. He's already shaved his neck, and started adopting hints of Craig's style of dress.

CRAIG
Since you're so up on the Playbook, give me Dirk's Plague Story. I wanna hear your delivery.

Without going schticky, Craig speaks in a voice that makes it clear he's rehearsing as the girl.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I don't know, this moving really fast. I just met you! I never would do something like this.

ANDREW

You're right, we should stop. You know, stop me if you've heard this one, but I once heard this story about a guy, who was walking on the street one day, and saw this just... Gorgeous girl. And they decided to stop and talk... And it was just natural and spontaneous...

Craig studies him, doesn't give away his reaction to Andrew's strategic pauses or precisely-maintained tone.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

And they just... clicked. It felt like fate. It was like this flame that grew warmer and brighter when they were together. But they decided to test it. They went their separate ways and figured, that if it was really destiny, they'd find each other again.

A beat. Andrew looks down, as if remembering an actual tragedy.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

But there was a plague that hit the city where they lived, and a lot of people died. And it wasn't until years later, that there was this guy walking in that town, and a beautiful girl walking towards him. And they passed by each other, just remembering some small, faint flicker of having seen that person before. But they kept walking...

Craig betrays the hint of a smile.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Does the story really work?

CRAIG

Well, it's like salt. Use it sparingly. But you get some Last-Minute Resistance... Dirk made a killing with that story.

ANDREW

Dirk the guy who taught you?

CRAIG
Yeah. His game was infomercials. He’d sell a VHS course in sets of twenty. He learned from Flash Turner, did tear-out ads in magazines.

ANDREW
What, every few years, there's a new guy?

CRAIG
You eventually retire and live off royalties. Next guys update the look, get a new sales strategy, and keep the whole thing alive.

Andrew affects a laugh of disbelief.

ANDREW
Why retire?

CRAIG
(shrugs)
This is a young man's game. Speaking of which, I need to see you in the Field.

INT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Somewhere Downtown. An aged movie theater converted into a massive club, with Aztec-inspired decor and a bustling clientele.

The screen has been removed, its platform turned into a stage for the DJ, surrounded by JUMBO MONITORS displaying color-shifting video loops of a JELLYFISH swimming, timed to pulse with the MUSIC.

Craig's in the middle of teasing a pair of AMATEUR MODEL-types, edging away from them and cutting a few stacked lines of conversation short.

CRAIG
Ladies, I really gotta get back to my friend.

AMATEUR MODEL #1
Tell him to come here!

CRAIG
Or how about you come with me?

The first girl turns to her friend, they share a considering look.

AMATEUR MODEL #2
Sure!
They follow Craig across the floor, slipping through the crowd.

From a few yards ahead, Craig spots Andrew talking to two leggy SISTERS, just too far away to be audible over the MUSIC and CHATTER.

His face is earnest, he leans in to the conversation. The Sisters start turning away from him, Andrew turns to keep them engaged, but it's far from working. One of the Sisters blatantly puts her hand up, like a cop signalling him to halt.

Andrew's face sours. He spits out one last word and leaves, the Sisters look at each other, sharing a face of mutual disgust. Andrew stomps away, spotting Craig and making to join him. He is pure, concentrated vitriol.

ANDREW
Fucking bitches, man!

Craig goes wide-eyed, he turns and sees the two Models already breaking away.

INT. NEW KINGS PRESS OFFICES / MEETING ROOM - DAY

Craig paces the floor, arms crossed. Andrews sits with his shoulders hunched.

ANDREW
(shrugs)
Tough crowd.

CRAIG
Don't put it on the girls, man. Better men than you probably pulled them last weekend without breaking a sweat. You blew up.

ANDREW
I may have gotten a little flustered...

CRAIG
Kid, you had straight-up War Face going on. I hope your Day Game isn't like that.

Andrew's head slumps down.

ANDREW
I'm sorry.

CRAIG
It's okay, just-- Jesus, take it easy...
ANDREW
I just figured that if they weren't
gonna play nice, why should I?

CRAIG
Listen, because of my experience,
I've got a way better reason to
wanna "rage against" the female
race than all the other guys who
try to play that angle. But I
don't. It sure as hell doesn't help
you pull. You wanna teach Game, you
have to be infallible at it.

An alarm BEEPS on Craig's phone. He slips it out of his
pocket to deactivate it.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Alright, I gotta go.

ANDREW
Picking up your kid?

CRAIG
(harsh)
Excuse me?

ANDREW
I'm sorry, I heard you had a kid.

CRAIG
You heard online "Finesse has a
kid"?

ANDREW
Do you?

A long beat, then...

CRAIG
No. Come on.

He gestures for Andrew to rise and follow him out the door.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Have Scott give you the DVD on Day
Game. And no more questions about
my personal life, capisce?

ANDREW
Yeah, got it.

Craig affirmatively pats Andrew's shoulder.

CRAIG
'Til next week.
INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Hyper-modern decor, everything cast in chrome, or bold black, white, and red. The perfect Platonic Form of a "pad". Craig enters and beelines to...

CRAIG'S BEDROOM

Huge amounts of attention have gone into its design: The Maserati of beds, the Rolex of dressers, and a MIRRORED CEILING. Craig strips off his vestments, exchanging them for a similar outfit to what he wore at the school.

Once changed, he exits back into the...

LIVING ROOM

Where he grabs a shopping bag from the nearby couch. He carries it down the hall and produces a KEY, and unlocks the door to...

CALLIE'S BEDROOM

Just as lavish. Brightly painted, with a cartoonish jungle theme, the centerpiece being an odd structure effecting a playhouse/bunk bed hybrid. Almost as if Craig ripped the whole interior out of some catalog.

He pulls a brand new night light out of the bag, and replaces it in the outlet where another, unimpressive-looking one stood.

He hits the light switch and tests the new light: it simulates light filtering through a dense forest canopy all over the room.

CRAIG
(sotto)
Okay...

EXT. TARA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Worn, cracked stucco. Fading mint green paint stained by a few streaks of rust.

Craig, in his fatherly wardrobe knocks on the door of Apartment D. A wiry, horse-faced BOYFRIEND (45) in a baggy shirt pops his head out, all smiles as soon as he sees Craig.

BOYFRIEND
Hi, Fin--Craig?

CRAIG
Yeah.

The Boyfriend extends his hand.
BOYFRIEND
Ah, cool! I'm--

CRAIG
I'm not gonna remember your name. Sorry. I don't remember last week's name, either.

The Boyfriend's face drops. Tara appears in the doorway. Petite, blonde, with familiar almond-shaped eyes with excessive eyeliner. Her voice cool, detached.

TARA
She's getting ready.

The Boyfriend wordlessly slips away, leaving silence between Tara and Craig.

TARA (CONT'D)
You two make friends?

CRAIG
I already don't like this one.

TARA
Of course you don't. I called the school. Go to the office next time and show them ID.

Craig doesn't even nod. Tara's voice grows barbs.

TARA (CONT'D)
You're welcome.

Callie reaches the doorway, backpack on and pulling a little pink, wheeled suitcase. She stops by Tara. Her voice is almost resigned.

CALLIE
Bye, mommy.

Tara stoops next to her for a maternal kiss.

TARA
Good bye, sweetheart. I love you.

CALLIE
I love you too.

Callie slips past Craig and starts for the cement stairs leading down from the building. Craig turns to Tara, gesturing back inside the apartment.

CRAIG
I don't want this guy around my kid.

TARA
(re: Craig)
I don't really want this guy around mine.

Craig starts after Callie, throwing the last word over his shoulder.

CRAIG
He's one of my fans.

Tara's brow furrows.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Craig sits on a bench, guarding Callie's backpack, watching her run around a plastic playground with several other KIDS. He looks the most content he's ever been.

A few yards off, a group of SUBURBAN MOMS sit under a gazebo, casting occasional eyes at Craig, but chatting amongst themselves.

Craig's phone RINGS, souring his mood. He answers.

CRAIG
(into phone)
Yep?

SCOTT (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Hey, sorry. Just got a booking offer. Big one.

CRAIG
Who for?

SCOTT (V.O.)
They're called the Alpha Chapter.

CRAIG
Alpha Chapter of what?

SCOTT (V.O.)
That's it. They're not a frat, but they're kinda like a Future Business Leaders of America, I guess? Anyway, Brock got them for twelve grand. You wanna book?

Craig looks back to the playground, his eyes find Callie again.

CRAIG
No calls after this, okay? Set it for the soonest free weekend.

SCOTT (V.O.)
Got it.

Craig hangs up. A bicycle-riding cop rolls by, BRENDA (34). Tan, athletic, with her hair pulled back tight and triangular sunglasses. She stops her bike beside Craig's bench.

BRENDA
Afternoon.

CRAIG
(inquisitive)
Hi.

BRENDA
Can I ask you what brings you here today?

CRAIG
Uh... Court order?

Brenda stares, humorless.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I'm with my kid. It's my weekend with her.

BRENDA
That's fine.
(re: playground)
Can you tell me which one she is?

Craig points to Callie, now crawling backwards up one of the plastic slides.

CRAIG
Brown hair, green shirt, climbing the slide.

Craig nods towards the Moms under the gazebo.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
What, you don't get too many men here? The Stepford Wives tell you I was ogling their kids? Some McMartin Trial shit?

BRENDA
I'm just doing my patrol, sir.

CRAIG
Sure.

Craig stands, lifts Callie's backpack. Callie stops what she's doing and stares at her agitated father and the dark-clad Brenda.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Well, it was fun, but now I gotta find somewhere my daughter and I won't be harassed, so...

CALLIE
Daddy?

Brenda looks to the girl, takes off her sunglasses.

BRENDA
(to Craig)
What's her name?

CRAIG
Callie.

Brenda sits on her haunches, facing Callie.

BRENDA
It's okay, Callie. I just have to talk to your dad for a second.

Callie toddles over to stand behind Craig's legs, peeking out at Brenda. She stays squatting, looks to Craig, then to the girl.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
How old are you, sweetheart?

Callie holds up four fingers.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
Four?

She nods.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
Are you going to preschool?

CRAIG
She's in kindergarten.

CALLIE
Kindergarten.

BRENDA
Wow, smart girl.
(to Craig)
She get that from you?

CRAIG
Hope not.

Brenda smirks, pushes herself up to standing, faces Craig, nods towards the gazebo.

BRENDA
I'll make sure they know everything's copacetic.

She fishes a card out of her shirt pocket and hands it over.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
In case there's any trouble.

Craig takes it wordlessly. Brenda remounts her bike.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
You two have a good day. Bye, Callie.

She pedals off, Callie waves.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / CALLIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Craig zips up Callie's suitcase while she sits on her bed, dangling her legs. Craig crosses to her and ties her shoes on for her.

CRAIG
You have a good time?

CALLIE
Mm-hm. I don't wanna go back with Mommy.

Craig finishes the first shoe, stops for a moment.

CRAIG
No?

CALLIE
I want Mommy to come here.

Craig sighs, at a loss for a response. He ties the other shoe.

CRAIG
Come on, kiddo.

He lifts her off the bed with a swing. She giggles.

INT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Friday night. Packed. Andrew lounges at a few tables with his new entourage. Two artsy-looking girls (20s): one a REDHEAD, the other dainty, with a PIXIE CUT.

Craig strolls in. Andrew grabs a full lowball from a table, lets his hand rest on top of it for a brief moment, then swishes it around. Something CLOUDY swirls around in the drink, then clears up.
He meets Craig, extending the glass. Craig nonchalantly takes the drink, samples it.

CRAIG
What's the status?

ANDREW
I don't know. I'm trying to set up a Jealousy Subplot, but I'm getting a weird vibe.

CRAIG
(shakes his head)
Jealousy Subplots don't work with girls who know each other.

ANDREW
I thought chicks always fought with their girlfriends over guys.

CRAIG
Don't believe all you read on Pick-Up boards. Most of it's virgins indulging in wishful thinking.

Craig sips, his face goes sour for a moment.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
What's in this?

Andrew rolls his eyes.

ANDREW
It's all cheap shit, here.

Craig gulps some more of the drink, washing it past his tongue. Andrew tries not to stare.

CRAIG
So, has the redhead indicated interest yet?

ANDREW
I-- uh...

CRAIG
If you don't know, then No. So, the pixie cut's your Mark.

ANDREW
But I want the redhead.

CRAIG
The redhead's gonna run interference. You've landed your Approach with the pixie girl. You don't move into Rapport-building now, you'll lose the whole set.
ANDREW
Guys from my frat say chicks with short hair are all damaged goods.

CRAIG
If the guys from your frat knew shit, they wouldn't be proud for pulling state school chicks. You let me game the redhead, I can turn that into a vouch and a DHV for you. Okay?

Andrew shines just a glimmer of his "War Face" from earlier, aimed spitefully at Craig.

ANDREW
Okay. How's about... Tattoo Interview routine?

CRAIG
Try it.

He sends Andrew back into the fray, he follows after a beat, sipping from the glass.

CUT TO:

INT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB - LATER

Craig stares ahead, just barely paying attention as the Redhead chats with him. He glances around and spies Andrew animatedly talking with the Pixie Cut girl by the nearest bar.

Andrew surreptitiously makes eye contact with Craig, who gives a small, directional hand signal. Andrew nods while the Pixie Cut girl hails a BARTENDER.

Craig blinks. He's bleary-eyed.

POV CRAIG ON ROOM

Blurry. Intermittently, he can see the room in focus, and understand an odd word from the Redhead. But mostly it's fuzzy lights and muffled MUSIC THUMPING.

REDHEAD
Fin? Are you okay?

BACK TO SCENE

His mouth moves lazily, he seems heavily drunk but he's still trying to play cool.

CRAIG
Yeah. Hey, let's put a pin in that. I'll be right back.
He rises to his feet and starts crossing the floor, his knee BANGS against a table covered in empty glasses he didn't notice. He grits his teeth and stumbles.

He blinks, the room growing ever darker and blurrier around him.

FADE THROUGH BLACK:

EXT. CAB ON FREEWAY - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Craig's eyes peel open. He pulls himself off the window and to his right sees SILHOUETTES, their voices WARPED and unintelligible, interrupted by unnerving LAUGHTER.

FADE THROUGH BLACK:

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Craig staggers into the KITCHEN, inky blackness all around him. He finds the Redhead lying on her side on the linoleum. She's DISHEVELED, her eyes are WATERY, her nose is BLEEDING.

If it weren't for the rise and fall of her chest as she breathes, she'd look dead. Craig stares. He looks pretty damn sober now. He staggers backwards and FALLS.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Tranquil. SUNLIGHT streaks through the blinds, casting razor blades of light on Craig, lying passed-out on the couch. His bloodshot eyes slip open, he rouses.

He slips off the couch, the first thing touching the ground: his bad knee.

CRAIG
(shocked, pained)
God damn it!

Pulling himself up to sitting on the couch, he looks around. All alone, still in his clothes from last night. He drags himself up to the...

BATHROOM

And rinses off his face. Andrew steps into the doorway.

ANDREW

Hey.
Craig GASPS in surprise, turns.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I tried calling you, wanted to make sure you were okay.

Craig pulls his PHONE out of his pocket, sees nothing but a blank screen.

CRAIG
Battery died.

ANDREW
I figured. You were pretty fucked-up.

CRAIG
Oh, Jesus...

ANDREW
What?

CRAIG
You see me take a white pill at any point last night?

ANDREW
I don't know, maybe.

CRAIG
Well, if I misjudged my timing, and popped one too close to when we were drinking...
(sotto)
Stupid...

Craig strolls out to the...

LIVING ROOM, and slides back onto the couch.

ANDREW
Well, you should be okay. She was just as fucked-up as you were. I doubt she remembers anything.

CRAIG
Who was?

ANDREW
The ginger chick, man. You closed with her, alright.

CRAIG
Did I?

Andrew scoffs, amused.

ANDREW
Wow, you really don't remember.

CRAIG
I guess not.

ANDREW
Well, it's all good, it's not like she'd remember enough to report you.

CRAIG
"Report" me? What the fuck for?

Silence, then Andrew SNICKERS, his face twisting into an unnerving grin.

ANDREW
Uh... Rape, man. Probably rape.

Craig's face goes white. He stands and speaks forcefully, edging in close to Andrew.

CRAIG
What happened to her? Tell me, you creepy little shit--!

ANDREW
I'll tell you what--

Andrew pulls out his own cell phone, presses a few buttons across the touch-activated screen.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
We got a cab from the club, all hung out here for a while. Before you passed out, I got this...

Andrew holds up the phone, plays a VIDEO:

DARK, BLURRY FOOTAGE.

The REDHEAD, heavily intoxicated, fighting a pair of MALE HANDS on her, a DARK TORSO shoves her to the floor. Sounds of STRUGGLE, a SCREAM.

Andrew SNICKERS again, turning off the video and pocketing his phone.

Craig sweats, sick with terror.

CRAIG
That's not me.

ANDREW
You sure? I was holding the camera.

CRAIG
Bullshit. This is some fucking joke.

ANDREW
That's real good, Craig. Tell the cops it was a joke; you fucked her ironically.

Andrew beams.

CRAIG
Where is she now?

ANDREW
Sent her home in a cab. She won't be up in time to have a kit run. No DNA or anything.

He pats the pocket where he stowed his phone.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I'm the only one who can prove anything either way.

CRAIG
Give me that phone.

ANDREW
I got a backup. Fuck it, I got more phones, too.

CRAIG
That was you. You fucked her.

ANDREW
I'm a Poli Sci major from a nice family. You're President of Sleezy Fuckers Anonymous. Who're they gonna believe?

Andrew watches Craig's fists ball up.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I'd chill with that. Shit, you'd have to kill me. You'd get busted either way, and your kid won't be seeing much of you after that.

CRAIG
What do you want from me?

ANDREW
Hey, I'm not trying to be mean, man. I just got some things I want to accomplish, and I need you handy.

(beat)
I think you'll end up liking me, Craig. We got so much in common, you know? We're both Alpha males. Sometimes we just play a little rough with each other.

Andrew smiles pleasantly, puts his hands congenially on Craig's shoulders.

**ANDREW (CONT'D)**
Come on, let's go out again tonight. Drinks can be on me, if you really want.

Craig tries to push past him, stumbles. Andrew puts his arms out to steady him. Craig tears away down the hall.

**INT. CRAIG'S CAR IN PARKING GARAGE - DAY**

Craig turns the ignition, plugs his phone into his car charger. A VERY LOW BATTERY icon shows, Craig fiddles with the buttons, trying to bring the thing back to life before dropping it in a huff.

**CRAIG**

Fuck!

He throws the car in gear and backs out of his parking space.

**INT. RENTED STUDIO - DAY (SCREEN VIEW)**

A BLACK BACKDROP: Craig and Brock sit beside each other in a pair of armchairs, facing an unseen audience, looking like co-hosts on a budget talk show.

**CRAIG**

(continuing)
When your Game starts improving, and you get more in-touch with your Alpha male qualities, people notice. Especially female friends.

**BROCK**
(to Audience)
You guys should all be taking notes.

**CRAIG**
The classic line is "You used to be so nice". Which means "You used to be weak; I used to have a handle on you". You don't want to be "nice".

**BROCK**
Never be nice. Nice is limpduck.
Craig motions between him and Brock, smirks.

**CRAIG**
We're not nice guys.

**BROCK**
Hell, in the... "traditional" sense of the term, we're not even good people.

They CHUCKLE.

**PULL OUT TO REVEAL:**

**INT. NEW KINGS PRESS OFFICES - DAY**

Alone, Scott watches the previous scene as a VIDEO on his COMPUTER SCREEN, his back to the window where CRAIG can be seen, storming the door while fighting with his limping leg.

In front of Scott, another window looks into BROCK'S OFFICE, where Brock paces the floor in the middle of an animated phone call.

**CRAIG**
Scott!

Scott pulls out his headphones currently carrying the footage's audio, and turns.

**SCOTT**
Hey, just doing a quality check. Didn't know you were coming in today.

Craig bristles. His mouth cracks open, at a loss.

**SCOTT (CONT'D)**
You okay, man?

**CRAIG**
Yeah. Fine. Listen, I gotta check my company card.

**SCOTT**
Uh, sure...

A few keystrokes and Scott replaces the video with a spreadsheet of credit card transactions. Craig juts his face towards the screen, all but shoving Scott out of the way.

His lips quiver, muttering silently to himself as he reads.

**CRAIG**
Okay... bar... the cab...
Craig palms Scott's mouse, scrolls up and down, searching.

    CRAIG (CONT'D)
    (muttering)
    Come on... Come on...

His finger on the scroll wheel picks up speed, as do his scanning eyes. His face becomes strained, desperate.

    SCOTT
    You looking for something?

He breaks away from the screen.

    CRAIG
    Nah. Nah, it's fine.
    (sotto)
    I got nothing.

    SCOTT
    Something wrong with the card?

    CRAIG
    No. All good. I-I gotta jet.

Scott's tone is transparent: he can tell Craig's panicked, but confused as to why.

    SCOTT
    Alright, see ya...

    CRAIG
    Scott?

    SCOTT
    Yeah?

    CRAIG
    How well would you say you know me?

    SCOTT
    Um... I don't know, Craig. About as well as anyone else, I suppose.

    CRAIG
    What does that mean?

    SCOTT
    Well, I don't know... You gotta understand, I was working here six months before I even learned your real name. But that's the nature of the business, I guess. Brand image and all that.

Craig half-nods rethinks his line of questioning.

    CRAIG
You think you could attest to my character pretty well?

Scott cocks his head.

SCOTT
Is this a Tara thing?

CRAIG

He makes for the door. Scott looks up to his shared window with Brock. Still holding the phone, Brock gestures inquisitively: "What was that about?". Scott replies with a shrug.

EXT. CRAIG'S CAR ON FREEWAY - DAY

Stop-and-go traffic, each lurch forward seems to make Craig's heart pound a beat faster. He looks sickly, drained. Having to switch between gas and brake is taking a toll on his bad knee. He grips it, trying to squeeze the building pain away.

His charging cell phone, now with a big enough sliver of battery life, begins to RING.

Craig stares at the screen. Caller ID says it's Andrew.

The RINGING continues, then reaches the end. Call goes to voicemail.

Craig sighs a tiny bit.

The RINGING begins again. Craig grits his teeth, answers.

CRAIG
(into phone)
Yeah?

ANDREW (V.O.)
(over speaker phone, filtered)
So...

CRAIG
So?

ANDREW
Your place at seven?

CRAIG
How about yours? At eight?
Quiet WHITE NOISE over the phone. Andrew's silent for a beat.

ANDREW
That give us enough time?

CRAIG
We'll run a bounce.

ANDREW
A bounce?

CRAIG
Yeah. Keep changing venues once we've hooked a set. Makes the ARC take less time. Sound good?

Another long break on Andrew's end. Craig tries to stifle his own nervous breathing.

ANDREW
See you then.

He HANGS UP. Craig sighs, he spies his PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE sitting in his center console. Rather than grab for it, he puts it in another compartment in the console and shuts the lid over it.

CRAIG
(anxious)
Fuck.

INT. HISTORIA TAVERN - NIGHT

Rustic decor, wallpaper made of reprinted 19th Century lithographs of the New York skyline. Craig strides up to the bar and flags down the BARTENDER.

CRAIG
Just a water.

BARTENDER
We only have bottled.

Craig reaches for his wallet.

CRAIG
Fine.

BARTENDER
You want Dasani, Voss, Pellegrino...?

CRAIG
Just whatever, man.
He slaps a few bills on the bar, cracks into the bottle he gets in response. He gazes across the room, seeing Andrew placidly chatting with a pair of mid-20's SILVERLAKE GIRLS, one with a BLACK BOB, the other a WAIFISH sandy blonde.

The one with the Bob approaches Craig, who slides back into his long-rehearsed display of total ease.

BLACK BOB GIRL
(re: water bottle)
Thirsty?

CRAIG
Yeah, usually.

She smirks.

BLACK BOB GIRL
You know, my friend thinks you're cute...

CRAIG
Yeah? Well, let her know I don't hold it against her.

She scoffs, more amused than offended.

BLACK BOB GIRL
God, you're such a dick!

CRAIG
Woah now, aren't we acting a little too familiar?

BLACK BOB GIRL
Well, you're acting like you're ignoring her.

CRAIG
I'm playing hard-to-get.

He takes a punctuated swig from his water. She rolls her eyes.

BLACK BOB GIRL
You guys are ridiculous.

Craig looks over her shoulder and sees Andrew locking eyes with him, winking. Andrew's mouth tugs into a half-smile; knowing and intimidating. Craig looks slightly queasy, sips from his water.

CRAIG
That's one word for it.

INT. ALL-NIGHT DINER - NIGHT
Craig, Andrew, and the two Silverlake Girls sit in a booth in front of mostly-empty plates. The conversation between Andrew and the Girls is MUFFLED, fading behind an intense, anxiety-generated TINNITUS ringing in Craig's ears.

A late-40's Hispanic SERVER refills Craig's mug of black coffee. Craig uses his fork to dredge out some ice cubes from his glass of water and drop them in the mug. He stirs until the steam subsides, then swills the contents.

The tinnitus fades, as the WAIFISH girl speaks up, her voice demure, just shy of cracking.

WAIFISH GIRL
So where are we going after this?

CRAIG
(to Andrew)
Your place. Remember?

Andrew cocks his head.

ANDREW
Yeah. Well, you guys are all welcome to stay for a little bit, sample some of LA's finest tap water, but I gotta be up early.

BLACK BOB GIRL
Oh bullshit, you do!

ANDREW
(playful)
Jesus, this one's got a mouth on her!

CRAIG
Didn't anybody teach you how to act in polite company?

BLACK BOB GIRL
(snickers)
You guys are not polite company.

ANDREW
I think we might surprise you.
(to Craig)
Right?

Craig tilts his head, shrugs as he sips from his coffee.

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Sparsely-decorated and dimly-lit. Living room is home to a large, black faux-leather couch. Not partaking, Andrew watches as the two Silverlake girls pass a blown glass pipe between them. The Waifish girl takes a hit, COUGHS heartily.
WAIFISH GIRL
Woah... Jesus...

The Black Bob Girl chuckles.

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT/BATHROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Craig stands over the toilet, the TRICKLE dies down. Craig finishes, ZIPS up. His face is grave. Stone sober.

BLACK BOB GIRL (O.S.)
(giggles)
"Gotta cough to get off."

He hits the lever, the toilet FLUSHES. Craig swings open the door and sees--

THE WAIFISH GIRL
Eyes cast up to his, open, expectant.

Over her shoulder, Craig spies a LAPTOP sitting on a desk beyond another doorway, its few lights glowing.

WAIFISH GIRL
Hey...

She tiptoes towards him.

CRAIG
Hey.

His eyes jump between the laptop and her. She edges closer, closes the bathroom door behind him. Her hair falls across her face, a little sloppily.

She's trying her damnedest to be seductive, but the insecurity shines through. Craig looks uneasy, as if she were just a kid approaching him. Her hands travel up to his shoulders, she stands on her toes to touch her mouth to his.

Her eyes hold shut, he keeps one of his watching the doorway, and the laptop. He interrupts the kiss, pulls his head back. Her eyes go wide.

WAIFISH GIRL
Is-- Is something wrong?

CRAIG
No, I just--

WAIFISH GIRL
(jittery)
I'm sorry. I don't usually-- You know, it's not-- I--
He puts a finger to her lips. His tone is gentle, calming.

CRAIG
Shhhh... We'll pick this up later, okay?

He turns on the patented smile. She lights up a bit.

WAIFISH GIRL
Okay.

Craig gestures back toward the living room; Andrew and the other Girl.

CRAIG
I'll meet up with you in a sec.

She nods, leaves. As soon as she's out of sight, Craig's mask drops. He pokes his gaze into the hallway. Coast clear, he slips into...

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Craig crosses to the desk and stands over the laptop. He shakes his fingers on the track pad. The screen lights up--

THE DESKTOP, no password protection. Craig starts skimming through Andrew's data, looking for any video files.

A HAND clamps tightly over Craig's mouth just as a FOOT stomps on his bad knee. Craig buckles, falls, his cry of pain muffled by the hand. Andrew leans in over his shoulder, holding tightly over Craig's mouth, snickering.

ANDREW
(hushed)
Ha ha! Almost, man! Real fucking sneaky! But let's play nice, yeah?

Andrew pulls his hand way. Craig MOANS softly his voice cracking.

CRAIG
(pained)
Fuck... My leg--!

ANDREW
Come on, Craig. Let's not be like this. We still gotta Close.

CRAIG
(sputtering)
I'm not doing shit for you.

Andrew scowls, rises. He lets Craig slump to the floor and gives another kick into Craig's knee. Craig jolts, GROANS through gritted teeth. Andrew picks up the laptop.
ANDREW

This doesn't even have a copy on it, yet.

He exits, shutting the door and leaving Craig in the darkness behind him. He walks back to...

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

The Silverlake Girls look up from the couch to the entering Andrew.

WAIFISH GIRL

Where's Fin?

ANDREW

He's not feeling so hot. Had to lie down.

WAIFISH GIRL

Is he okay?

ANDREW

Yeah, he'll be good in the morning.

The Girls share a series of pointed looks. The Waifish one sharing an uneasy suspicion, her dark-haired friend challenging, prying to stay. The Waifish girl holds firm, and her friend acquiesces. She SIGHS.

Andrew stares, confused by the wordless interchange.

BLACK BOB GIRL

Well, we should go.

WAIFISH GIRL

Yeah...

BLACK BOB GIRL

We've really had fun, but we actually gotta be up early, too.

They stand, start collecting shoes and purses. Andrew's face turns stern. He goes for broke.

ANDREW

I'm not gonna pay for a cab back if you two leave.

The Girls take immediate umbrage.

BLACK BOB GIRL

Did we ask?

The Black Bob girl leads her friend out the door, barely looking at Andrew as they split.
BLACK BOB GIRL (CONT'D)

(icy)
Good night.

The door shuts. Andrew stands in the silence, bristling.

ANDREW
(spits, sotto)
Cunts!

He stomps towards the bedroom door. As soon as it opens, Craig's FIST connects near his nose, flinging his head back.

Andrew staggers back.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Fuck!

He doubles over, almost immediately bursting into strained LAUGHTER.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
You motherfucker!

Craig limps into the hall, but keeps his distance from the cackling Andrew. Blood starts to spurt from Andrew's nose, then drips steadily. Andrew throws his hands up to block it. His laughter breaks for just a moment.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Oh shit!

He breaks away to the Bathroom. Craig stands, dumbfounded as he hears the SINK start running.

ANDREW (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You're being a really shitty friend, you know that?

CRAIG
What is wrong with you?

ANDREW (O.S.)
Oh, you're making me out to be the bad guy? It's social dynamics, man. You wrote the fucking book on it! Your name's at least on the cover!

Craig approaches the door, slowly, compensating for his limp and trying to be as silent as possible.

The SINK shuts off, the last of the water GURGLES down the drain. Craig's hand reaches for the doorknob, just as Andrew emerges from the bathroom with a wad of bloodied toilet paper pressed against his nose.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I'm just trying to-- Hey!
Craig slips through the door, SLAMMING it shut behind him.

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Craig awkwardly tears down the unpainted hallway, dragging his bad leg behind him.

EXT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB - DAY

Craig KNOCKS on the front door, tries to peer around into the darkened, obscured windows into the club. He KNOCKS again on the front door. A youngish, white-shirted HOST finally pokes his head through the door.

HOST
   (flat)
   We're closed.

CRAIG
I know. Listen, uh, were any of your staff here right now working on Friday night?

HOST
I was.

CRAIG
Okay. I know this is a long shot, but I need to know if you saw a specific person that night.

HOST
Who were they?

CRAIG
Uh, redhead girl, maybe about twenty-five, twenty-six--

HOST
(incredulous)
Do you have a name? Was she with a private party?

CRAIG
I don't know.

The Host rolls his eyes, makes a show of his annoyance.

HOST
Do you know how many people come through here on--

Craig cuts him off, already starts leaving.

CRAIG
Thanks. Forget it.
EXT. DOWNTOWN GAS STATION - DAY

Dingy. Craig shoves the nozzle into his gas tank and locks the handle. He slumps against the side of his car, letting it support his weight.

A few pumps away he sees the BLONDE FASHION STUDENT exit the cashier station and enter her sporty little Asian-made sedan. Craig drops his head, tries to obscure his face until she's driven off.

His cell RINGS. He checks the screen deliberately: SCOTT.

CRAIG
(into phone)
Yeah?

SCOTT
(over phone, filtered)
Hey, man. Those Alpha Chapter guys wanna get a confirmation.

CRAIG
(sotto)
Christ...

He rubs his forehead, straining.

SCOTT
Craig?

CRAIG
Yeah, confirm.

SCOTT
You sure?

The gas pump handle pops out of its locked position with a metallic CLUNK.

CRAIG
Yeah. What the hell else can I do?

He yanks the nozzle out of his car and forces it back into the rack.

INT. MOOSE LODGE / HALLWAY - DAY

Off-white paint and linoleum losing their luster. Fading photos adorn the walls.

Craig leads Scott and Brock toward a door. Scott holds his cell phone to his ear.

SCOTT
No messages on the office line.
CRAIG
You sure?

BROCK
Yeah, maybe "You have no new messages" was a suggestion...

Craig cocks his head toward Brock, stern.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Relax, man.

CRAIG
I'm fine.

He passes through the door into...

INT. MOOSE LODGE / MEETING ROOM - DAY

Thirty-some YOUNG MEN all sit in folding chairs. All in their twenties, none of them outright ugly, but all distinctly unhandsome. Forward-slung necks. Weak chins. Acne scars. Too scrawny, or too fat, or too short.

Craig walks the aisle, slowing as his gaze scans them all. Bad posture, poor grooming, ill-picked clothes. The terminally uncool. All watch Craig with awe, and hope for rescue.

ZACH, 24, a blonde kid with just enough dynamism to be clearly in the upper-crust of these misfits, speaks from the stand.

ZACH
Well, here's our guest of honor! So men, let's welcome Finesse!

Reverent applause. Zach indicates a chair for Craig to take.

ZACH (CONT'D)
So, why don't you tell us a bit about yourself; how you got started...

Craig slides into his persona. He scans the crowd from his new vantage point.

CRAIG
You know, I tend not to delve too into the "how", because it's not really important when it comes right down to it. What I want to know is how I can help you.

He gestures out to the crowd, then his eyes catch something he couldn't see from the aisle.
ANDREW

Sits tucked in the corner of a back row, locking eyes with him, beaming. Next to him is the slick-looking MARCUS (30).

His clothes have grown darker, hipper, edgier. He's branding himself better, his posture's taller and more confident.

Craig turns to Zach, shakes off the furrow in his brow.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
So just, give me an idea of who you are.

ZACH
Well, I'm Zach, Andrew--over there-- and I started this club to be a sort of safe space for guys to get together and-- Jimmy, why don't you just read the Charter?

JIMMY (21) a sweaty, hefty kid in cargo shorts sits in front with his laptop out; the de facto Secretary. He opens up another document and reads.

JIMMY
The Alpha Chapter is an off-campus, unofficial, intercollegiate club of young men concerned with the preservation of masculine and traditional values, and activism in favor of Men's Rights everywhere.

CRAIG
"Men's Rights"?

Jimmy's free hand balls into a meaty, expressive fist that pounds the air like a gavel as his reading picks up fervor.

JIMMY
We hold that sex roles and traditional values evolved and/or were instilled by God to benefit and preserve the human race.

Craig looks over the crowd. Blank looks of affirmation. Smiles. Nods. They're getting juiced by this.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
We oppose all forms of Socialism, Feminism, Cultural Marxism, and Political Correctness, and hold that these forces destroy the family unit, decrease the fertility rate, and cause overall societal decline.

YOUNG MEN
(calling, various)
Yeah! Here, here!

JIMMY
We seek an end to the ongoing War
on Manhood, and the cultural
terrorism that is attempting to
feminize the world and destroy the
supremacy of male-lead society.

A few sparse bouts of CLAPPING, Jimmy and the crowd look
eagerly to Craig.

CRAIG
(hesitant)
Well, that was rousing.

The crowd CHUCKLES.

INT. MOOSE LODGE / HALLWAY - DAY - LATER

Andrew steps outside with Marcus, CRAIG'S VOICE still
seeping through the door.

ANDREW
So?

MARCUS
Yeah, he's good. But I don't know
if I'm seeing it.

ANDREW
"Not seeing" what?

MARCUS
Like, I get him. He's an easy sell.
He's got the brand and the
following and all that. But what I
don't get is you. Where do you come
into this?

Andrew smiles. He holds up an index finger: "Just wait", and
turns for the door.

INT. MOOSE LODGE / MEETING ROOM - DAY

Andrew leads Marcus back in discretely, hugging the wall.
Craig stands on the stage, scratching his head as he wraps
up his answer to a previous question posed by a still-
standing SCRAWNY YOUNG MAN in the crowd.

CRAIG
(continuing)
I mean, everyone gets gun-shy. But
to say guys are being "shamed" out
of going after girls? I don't
know... You guys are making it sound like an organized front.

He just nods blankly and retakes his seat. It wasn't the answer he wanted to hear, but he doesn't have the spine to challenge it. As soon as he sits, hands raise.

Jimmy immediately stands up, nervously fiddling with the contents of his pockets.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Yes...?

JIMMY
You know, it's really hard to get rejected a lot, and think that there's something wrong with you. I mean, how do you even deal with that?

Craig's expression softens, relieved to get a familiar question, without the politicking. Andrew speaks before he can, already making for the stage.

ANDREW
I actually think I can answer that. You know, the great thing about Finesse is that he doesn't even know what it's like to lose.

CRAIG
I wouldn't say that.

ANDREW
I mean, you're the expert. When was the last time you really got shot down?

Andrew stands beside Craig, as though the two were a duo. Craig looks from Andrew, to the Young Men in the crowd.

Andrew flashes a grin to Marcus, then begins his own patented strut, owning the stage.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Studying with Fin's taught me a lot. Some of it, I don't even think he knew he was teaching me. Like, think about this: we base our value on our resources, our character, our intellect. Right?

CRAIG
Sure.

ANDREW
Right, that's us men. Women, their value is based on their
attractiveness. "She's hot; she's not". "She's a nine, she's a six". Right?

Much of the crowd speaks out in unison.

   YOUNG MEN
   Right!

Craig looks to Scott and Brock, sitting off to the side. Brock shrugs and gestures to the crowd. He can't deny, they're responding to Andrew.

   ANDREW
   But who decides that? I do. You do. A hot girl who doesn't give it up to you has no value. You're looking for the bird in the hand, not the one in the bush.

Brock audibly SNORTS in amusement.

   ANDREW (CONT'D)
   Yeah, pun not intended.

Getting the joke, the crowd CHUCKLES en masse.

   ANDREW (CONT'D)
   You're the man. You make the call as to how much this chick's worth. She says "No" to you, that mean's she's flunked, not you. So really, "No" means nothing!

The crowd CLAPS, sporadic shouts of "Yeah!" and other affirmations. Andrew glances at Marcus, who starts to clap, himself.

Andrew turns to Craig, flashes his grin again. Craig just looks into the grin. His own face shows a nagging, building dread, as if looking over a ridge and finding a hole with no bottom.

Marcus pulls out his cell phone and starts typing.

   MARCUS (V.O.)
   Oh shit yes; this is saleable.

   CUT TO:

   INT. NEW KINGS PRESS OFFICES - DAY

Craig, flanked by Scott and Brock, face the parading Marcus. Marcus is in his selling mode. His voice rings out thick, meaty, and full of affected, rapid-fire enthusiasm.
Andrew leans nearby, glowing with pride. Craig tries to shake the paralyzing dread off and come back to the present.

CRAIG
I'm sorry, what's your company's name again?

MARCUS
Premium Flow Entertainment. You know Deadliest Catch? That was almost ours.

BROCK
Love that show.

MARCUS
But screw it! This is better! "Pussy: the Real Deadliest Catch," right?

He snickers at his own quip. Brock matches the snicker by half. Marcus grabs a high-back office chair and spins it around, sits straddling it, gesticulating over the backrest.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Look, it's basically The Biggest Loser, but for virgins instead of lardasses. Get a bunch of guys saying they can't get laid.

Marcus looks from Craig, to Brock, to Andrew with each line item.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
You teach them the lines, the style, the... attitude. They fuck up: they get eliminated. Last man standing is crowned the King of Cunt, or whatever.

BROCK
(smirks)
They win a flat screen.

MARCUS
(laughs)
Yeah, right? Look, my bosses want new product, and I know this is in their wheelhouse. I can, at the very least get them to let us do a sizzle reel. You guys down?

A beat.

SCOTT
What's the title gonna be?

CRAIG
I don’t think "King of Cunt" is gonna fly.

MARCUS
I don’t know if you guys have any experience in Development, but it’s a lot of moving deck chairs. We’re gonna go through twenty titles before the thing is anywhere close to airing.

Andrew finally speaks up. His words come out measured, with weight.

ANDREW
So what first?

MARCUS
Well, like any other intellectual property, I need owner’s permission to shop this around.

All eyes turn to Craig.

CRAIG
I don’t own the Playbook.

MARCUS
It’s not the book, Fin. It’s you.

Craig waits a beat, wets his lips.

CRAIG
Marcus, could I get a word? Alone?

Brock and Scott rise. Though dragging his feet, Andrew follows as they file out.

Craig waits for the latch of the door to CLICK shut.

He gets up, steps closes to Marcus, his voice hushed.

CRAIG (CONT’D)
So, how well do you know Andrew?

MARCUS
Honestly? Not terribly well. Same neighborhood, his dad knows my dad. (shrugs)
He knows I work in reality TV and told me he thought he had something that could be a hit.

CRAIG
And you think this could be a hit?

MARCUS
You kidding me? A show about making cakes was a hit. This one's about the two most important things to most people: being cool, and getting laid.

Craig's voice drops in volume and octave, becomes grave.

CRAIG
Alright, full disclosure? If I had the option, I wouldn't be anywhere near him. I don't trust him, and I definitely wouldn't do business with him.

Marcus's edifice shatters for a brief moment. His ever-present verve is gone, and he speaks like a man being hunted.

MARCUS
I don't have a choice. And let's get real; you don't either.

CRAIG
Nobody gets over on me.

MARCUS
He already did. Keep him happy, and it won't get worse.

A KNOCK on the door, and Andrew pokes his head in.

ANDREW
Everything alright, guys?

Marcus sheds the gravity, re-assumes his slickness and pep.

MARCUS
All good, man! Hashing out some incidentals.

Andrew nods, satisfied. Craig steels himself, holds his utter rancor at bay, but behind his eyes his mind's racing. Andrew holds his gaze on Craig, trying to read him.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - DUSK

DAYS LATER

CRAIG'S CAR

Sits still in its reserved spot, Craig in the driver's seat, his cell phone to his ear.

CALLIE (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
I wanna stay with you again.
CRAIG
(into phone)
I know, Cal. Real soon, okay?

CALLIE (V.O.)
I don’t like it when you’re too busy.

CRAIG
Yeah, me neither.

TARA (V.O.)
(filtered, distant)
Say goodbye, Callie.

CALLIE (V.O.)
Mommy need the phone.

Craig sighs, truncated. His face seems to have grown a few new lines.

CRAIG
Okay. I love you, Callie.

CALLIE (V.O.)
Me too.

Craig smiles, laughs weakly. A beat, and Tara's voice replaces Callie’s.

TARA (V.O.)
You can't keep doing this to her. We all have to rearrange our schedules to fit you, but suddenly you're too busy? And I've got to pick up the pieces after you keep disappointing her?

CRAIG
You're right. I'm sorry.

He's genuine. That gives her pause.

TARA (V.O.)
Well that was new.

INT. NEW KINGS PRESS OFFICES / MEETING ROOM - DUSK

Aided by Scott, a small VIDEO CREW operates a simple camcorder setup, filming the room as Andrew leads the proceedings.

Brock and Craig stand by Andrew, addressing a crowd of the same Young Men from the Alpha Chapter meeting, with a few new faces. It's a tight fit to seat them all in the room.
Andrew talks to the crowd sharply, forcefully, like he's taking some cues from a recent viewing of *Patton*.

ANDREW

Gentlemen, you're all here to be vetted. Soon, you'll all have to prove yourself in the field. Most of you will crash and burn your first night out. I say this not to scare you, but to motivate you. Tonight's lesson is about Presentation. Fin, take it away.

Andrew steps back, conceding the floor to Craig. Craig looks over the crowd, takes in the odd uniformity of their expressions, like a herd of sheep.

CRAIG

I think Andrew--

Andrew correctively clears his throat.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

I'm sorry-- Power-- I think he's a great resource for you guys. He's more your age than Brock or me, but he's the fastest learner when it comes to Game that I've ever seen.

The homogenous face the Young Men all wear turns a shade more eager. Craig glances towards Andrew, sees the kid almost shocked to be so complimented. Craig hold his hand out toward him.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

This is your model.

INT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Andrew, his costume having grown even more gaudy and elaborate, strides confidently by a PUNKISH GIRL (20s) near the periphery of the dance floor. He engages her over his shoulder.

ANDREW

Hey, do you believe in ESP?

She lets out a long, exasperated GROAN.

PUNKISH GIRL

No, I don't believe in ESP! And I don't know what 80's singer your friend should name his dog after! And I definitely don't give a shit about the fight you say you just saw outside, which was apparently also going on just last week, too!
Andrew blinks, instantly angry, but at a total loss for a response.

PUNKISH GIRL (CONT'D)
I've heard it. All of it. I don't care. I'm not buying. Okay?

ANDREW
(terse)
Yeah.

PUNKISH GIRL
Good. Pass the word to your friends.

She gestures around the club as she turns her back on Andrew. He looks around.

ALL AROUND THE CLUB

Men dressed just like him; some his Alpha Chapter underlings, some recognizable from Craig's earlier seminar, and some just previously-unseen POSEURS swooping in on the fad.

The crowd of PATRONS, (both women and the few men who haven't jumped on the bandwagon) churns around, all trying to avoid Andrew's devotees and wannabes polka-dotting the room.

PRIVATE BOOTH

Zach sits, dejected, with three other post-Alpha Chapter Young Men. A bottle service set of vodka, mixers, and glasses occupies their table, untouched.

The Scrawny Young Man from earlier speaks up.

SCRAWNY YOUNG MAN
I told you this wouldn't work.

ZACH
Don't.

SCRAWNY YOUNG MAN
We paid twelve-hundred dollars... to sit down.

MANAGER'S OFFICE

A portly, Hispanic AZTECA MANAGER (40s) sits behind his desk. Comfortable room, mostly-quiet. The door opens, letting the DANCE MUSIC from the rest of the club flood in for a moment.

A burly BOUNCER (30s) steps in.
BOUNCER
You needed something?

AZTECA MANAGER
Yeah! Can we get the Gay Caballero Mafia out of here?

INT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB - MOMENTS LATER

All around the club, the BOUNCERS disperse, clicking small lanyard-hung flashlights in the eyes of everyone dressed like Andrew, ushering them to the doors.

Female Patrons look on as the extractions are carried out. Some clap.

SMALL BAR

One of the few tucked-away corners of the club. Craig stares into his glass, distant. A HAND grips his shoulder and turns Craig to face a seething Andrew.

ANDREW
Good fucking going! You totally poisoned the water!

CRAIG
Come again?

ANDREW
I'm not dumb, man. I know you did this on purpose. Now nobody can pull sluts in here, but you. Some teacher you are. Shit, some friend!

Craig goes wide-eyed.

CRAIG
Hey, Fifty-one Fifty! We're not friends!

Andrew throws Craig's incredulous tone right back.

ANDREW
Not anymore. I can't believe you. You never even wanted to help me, did you? You're horrible.

CRAIG
Can you explain to me what kind of _mutant species_ of Wrong is with you?

A Bouncer with a blinking flashlight cuts them off.

BOUNCER
Gentlemen, time to go!
Andrew gives Craig a threatening glare. They yield to the Bouncer and head for the exit.

EXT. AZTECA NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Jimmy, dressed in his own plus-size version of Andrew's uniform, stands in the back of a long line of CLUB GOERS being slowly let in.

He watches as Andrew's other clones start spilling out of the front door. Craig storms out among them Andrew himself not far behind.

ANDREW
You know, what I've got on you, if it spilled, Craig--

CRAIG
(interupts)
Then spill it! If I'm so bad, if I'm so guilty, report me. Let the world know!

Craig sweeps his hand, indicates the Young Men swarming outside the club.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I can't seem to get rid of you. But at least there'd be one less like you, right?

Andrew doesn't respond, just holds his glare. Craig turns on his heel and marches away, across the middle of the street.

INT. NEW KINGS PRESS OFFICES / BROCK'S OFFICE - DAY

Brock and Craig. Doors shut. Brock standing with his arms folded.

BROCK
There's been some complaints.

CRAIG
Yeah?

BROCK
Yeah. Nobody's happy about what happened at Azteca. The word "subterfuge" is getting thrown around.

Craig glances through the window into the adjoining office.

JIMMY
Sits at what used to be Scott's desk, typing on his computer.

CRAIG
Where's Scott?

BROCK
Scott left. Got a new job. I told you this.

CRAIG
You didn't.

BROCK
Well, somebody had to. And that's another thing...

Brock takes a pregnant pause.

BROCK (CONT'D)
What's with your pills?

CRAIG
Nothing's "with" them. I take them as needed. Which hasn't been for a while.

BROCK
Well, I'm getting complaints of you blacking out, getting belligerent...

CRAIG
Are you shitting me? I'm the least belligerent piece of this whole enterprise, these days. I mean, Christ, don't you see what's up with these kids? Andrew's got them all hopped up on some kind of-- worldwide vendetta.

BROCK
That's a pretty big charge. Yeah, the kid's intense, but--

CRAIG
The kid's psychotic.

Brock holds his hand out flat, as if ordering the room to steady.

BROCK
This isn't about Andrew. This is about you, Craig. I'm concerned about you.

CRAIG
There's a laugh.
BROCK
Look, just sort your shit out, man!
See a shrink, rehab, something. But
I can't have you sink this show, or
drag all of our prospects down with
you. I'm putting my foot down. Take
a sabbatical.

Craig breathes, rises for the door.

CRAIG
It's been real, Brock.

BROCK
Yeah.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - DAY

Craig crosses the floor towards his car, bright daylight
pouring in from the ramp out of the lot. He shuts himself
inside of his car, leaning back into his seat and finally
feeling an all-around calm take him over.


Craig opens the door.

CRAIG
I'm out. I'm gone. You got what you
wanted.

ANDREW
This isn't what I wanted.

CRAIG
Then what is?

ANDREW
I wanted us to be partners, man. I
wanted us to be friends.

CRAIG
Andrew, you don't know what that
word means. I don't think you have
the capacity to.

ANDREW
You should like me. I'm everything
the Playbook says to be.

(beat)
You're jealous, aren't you? You
know I'm the better man.

CRAIG
Oh, Jesus...
Craig motions to pull his door shut, Andrew puts his arm in the pathway, holds it open.

ANDREW
Admit it. I want to hear you admit it.

CRAIG
Or what? You're not gonna bust me. You need my name and my brand to sell your dog-and-pony show. I get popped, the bad press would kill you.

Craig shakes his head, then looks up at Andrew, his face like steel.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
If I knew who the girl was, I'd probably report it myself. Maybe they'd find out what actually happened.

There's deathly serious, and there's homicidally serious. Andrew turns the latter.

ANDREW
You better not.

CRAIG
I got a cop's business card in my wallet.

Andrew snaps into a fury, tears the door wide open, and STOMPS repeatedly on Craig's bad knee.

The pain overtakes Craig, he throws himself out of the car door, falling into Andrew, grabbing near his waist in a grappling hold.

They both fall to the concrete, hard. Andrew flails and kicks his legs, trying to break Craig's grip on him. Craig grapples as Andrew twists around. Now on top of Andrew, pressing him face-down into the ground, Craig's arms locking his in place.

Andrew's eye locks with Craig's, his spit spreads across the floor as he tries to breathe with his nose and lips mashed into the ground. All hate, all rage.

Craig raises an open palm and heavily SLAPS Andrew's ear. Andrew sputters, groans, thrashes. Craig shoves himself off the kid and pulls himself back into the car, closing and locking the door as swift as he can.

Andrew struggles to his feet, wobbling and disoriented, hand over his aching ear. He watches Craig start the ignition and
throw his car in gear, backing out and tearing out of the parking structure, no intention of looking back.

Andrew looks down. Craig's hat, fallen off in the scuffle, sits dented on the ground.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / BATHROOM - DAY

Shower running. Craig fights to keep himself standing under the water, all of his weight on his good leg. A tenuous sense of relief starts to creep in.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - DAY

Craig crosses out of the bathroom. Fresh, dressed, his support sleeve now holding his knee, keeping him somewhat steady.

A BOOKSHELF

Against the far wall holds a few comp copies of the New Kings Playbook sitting conspicuously on the bottom shelf. He grabs them all in one thick handful and lobs them into the nearest trash can.

He exhales sharply, a twinge of catharsis.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / CRAIG'S BEDROOM - DAY

DARKNESS, then--

Craig swings open the doors of his wardrobe, surveys the contents. He pulls a foil-printed shirt off a hanger and throws it over his shoulder. Then another shirt. Then a pair of designer jeans.

Soon enough, he's vigorously ripped out all of his "Finesse" costume pieces and strewn them across the floor behind him. He takes a step back, slipping on a shirt and falling back--

He lands sitting on the bed, safely, painlessly, glancing up toward the mirrored portion of his ceiling. He locks eyes with his reflection, makes a face.

Craig pulls to his feet and exits, re-entering a moment later, whipping a big, black GARBAGE BAG in the air to puff it open.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

SUPER: THREE WEEKS LATER.
Callie bounces from the edge of the campus to Craig, standing on the concrete island.

    CALLIE
    (calling)
    Daddy!

Craig stoops as she meets his arms, stands up and lets her swing in the air for a moment before setting her down.

    CRAIG
    Hey, kiddo.

She giggles, gleeful. He takes her hand and leads her to the car.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / KITCHEN – NIGHT

Craig busies himself over the stove, fixing dinner. Callie sits at the table, dragging a pencil across a printed worksheet, then finishing.

    CALLIE
    Done!

He turns.

    CRAIG
    Yeah?

She presents a sheet of recurring capital and lowercase 'G's, the first row traced, the second and third redone freehand. Rough, but properly-shaped by all accounts.

    CRAIG (CONT'D)
    Woah. Nicely done.

She grins and turns the sheet over to its blank side.

    CALLIE
    I gotta draw something that starts with 'G'.

Glancing around the kitchen, Craig reaches for the fridge, producing a bottle of juice, grapes drawn on the label. He holds it in front of Callie.

    CALLIE (CONT'D)
    That doesn't start with 'G'.

    CRAIG
    Yes, it does.

    CALLIE
    Nuh-uh. "Juice" is a "juh" sound. 'J'.
CRAIG
Wanna bet?

She hits some sudden realization. Craig nods, taps his finger on the label, pointing at both the grapes and the word "Grape".

She turns around and gets to drawing without a word.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
What? I help you out and no "Thank you"?

CALLIE
Do you want a trophy?

He scoffs, can't help but laugh.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Callie slips down a spiraling slide, touching bottom and immediately starting her climb back to the top.

Craig leans back on the bench, tasting the air. He looks toward the...

GAZEBO

Where one of the Suburban Moms catches eyes with him and returns a look of neutral acknowledgment.

The WHIR of bicycle wheels grabs Craig's attention. Brenda rolls by and brakes, planting a foot. Her tone bright, easy.

CRAIG
Hey.

BRENDA
Hey. So where've you been keeping yourself?

CRAIG
On ice, mostly. Finally got a break from work.

BRENDA
Oh yeah? Paid?

Craig smirks, turns his head to keep his attention evenly split between engaging Brenda and watching Callie.

CRAIG
Honestly? I won't know until a check posts. Or doesn't. Been trying to focus on other things.
Brenda follows his eyeline to Callie, she glances at Brenda as she clambers around the playground, exchanges a short wave.

**BRENDA**
How's she doing?

**CRAIG**
You know, I wanna say "Good", but I'm afraid of presuming too much.

Brenda flips the kickstand on her bike, unstraddles it.

**BRENDA**
Where is Mom, if you don't mind me asking?

**CRAIG**
Valley Village. Unless she moves in with this new guy of hers.

**BRENDA**
Not a fan?

He shrugs.

**CRAIG**
I can't talk; don't even know him.

**BRENDA**
I meant of Mom.

Craig looks to Callie, following her as she darts and weaves and jumps around.

**CRAIG**
Seeing what I got out of the deal, I can't complain. Besides, I wouldn't insult Callie by proxy.

**BRENDA**
You know--Granted, there wasn't a kid in the mix--But I wish my ex was even interested in not making things... adversarial.

**CRAIG**
I'll take that as a compliment.

Brenda smiles, steps closer. She steals a glance at her watch.

**BRENDA**
I may not be around anymore.

**CRAIG**
Oh? Getting transferred?
BRENDA
Yeah, I've got my interview soon.
May move up to Det I.

CRAIG
You're gonna have to translate that
for me.

BRENDA
Detective. Class I.

CRAIG
Jesus, wow... Well, good luck.

BRENDA
Thanks.

A beat. They hold a look at each other.

CRAIG
Can I ask you something? As a
private citizen, not in a law-
enforcement capacity?

BRENDA
You still have my card?

CRAIG
Yeah.

She steps back and remounts her bike. Still pleasant and
receptive.

BRENDA
Call me. Ask me then. Been too much
of a private citizen already.

She waves and pedals off.

EXT. TARA'S APARTMENT BUILDING – DAY

Craig knocks on the door, Callie and her luggage beside him.
Tara opens the door, already far more at-ease towards him
than last we saw her.

TARA
Hey.

CRAIG
Hey.

Callie steps in for a hug with her mom. Craig stoops to pick
up her bag. As he rises, he's faced with ROD (30s), dressed
in the full regalia of an Andrew disciple, including the
cocksure smirk.

TARA
Oh, Craig, this is Rod.

CRAIG

"Rod".

ROD

'Sup.

Rod takes Callie's back from Craig's hand and noncommittally places it on the floor inside the apartment.

Everything's an unspoken pissing match with Rod; he stands and moves like the doorway was some threshold he owns, and that Craig can't cross.

Callie looks from Rod, back to her dad, trying to read Craig's face. She detects some discomfort. She hugs Craig.

CALLIE

Bye, Daddy.

CRAIG

Bye.

A peck on the cheek from her, and she slips inside the apartment. As soon as she's passed in, Rod lets his palm come to a rest on Tara's ass, like the arm of a gate closing.

Tara's cowed, resigned. Craig sees Callie slow her roll deeper into the apartment. She sees it. He sees it. They each see that the other sees it.

Callie drips to her bedroom, closes the door. Craig keeps his voice down.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

What the hell is this?

Tara's eyes stay aimed at the floor.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

What the hell is this?

She slips out of Rod's hand.

ROD

(to Craig)

Something wrong, bro?

CRAIG

Yeah. You don't do that shit in front of my kid.

Rod smirks, chuckles.

ROD
Hey, she's gonna have to learn sometime, man.

CRAIG
Learn what? She's four.
(beat)
Learn what?

ROD
(to Tara)
Give us a sec, will you, babe?

He pats Tara again on the ass, sends her from the door. He steps out of the apartment, leaving the door open, speaking in hushed tones.

ROD (CONT'D)
Honestly, bro, sounds like you need this more than I do...

He reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a small, well-worn booklet, folded in half. He hands it to Craig.

ROD (CONT'D)
Here. This thing turned my life around, man.

"THE NEW KING'S PLAYBOOK: VERSION 2.0" heads the front cover. An attached sticker promises this new edition to be "BIGGER, LONGER, and STRONGER".

Centered, a composite of photos of Andrew and Craig, in their respective costumes, doctored to place them standing side-by-side, arms proudly crossed in front of their puffed-out chests, like longtime partners.

Craig looks at his own face on the cover, his own shit-eating smirk staring him down.

CRAIG
Are you serious?

ROD
What?

CRAIG
Are you fucking kidding me?

Craig folds the booklet along the crease Rod's made to fit it in his pocket, holding his portion of the cover right next to his face.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Look!

Rod's grin fades into flabbergasted recognition. Tara looks from the interior and sees what Rod seed. There's Finesse on the cover, and there's Craig in the flesh.
ROD
(stammers)
Oh... Wait...

Craig swings the booklet and bats Rod's garish hat off his head, revealing a premature bald spot. The hat tumbles to the floor.

ROD (CONT'D)
Hey--!

TARA
Craig!

CRAIG
The hell's wrong with you? Grow up!

He breaks his gaze with Rod, looks past him and locks eyes with Tara. She's surprised, but there's no anger. She relaxes for a beat, a moment of realization.

Craig tears away, in a huff. He stares at the booklet in his hands, and stuffs it into his jacket pocket.

EXT. CRAIG'S CAR ON DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY

Craig stews, chews his thoughts as he crawls through late-day traffic. Bumper MUSIC and a TALK SHOW HOST (late 30s) announcing the return from a commercial break over the stereo.

TALK SHOW HOST (V.O.)
(over radio, filtered)
...And we're back! Joining us today; Date Guru, Love Doctor, author of "The New King's Playbook"...

Craig's eyes bulge.

TALK SHOW HOST (V.O.)
...Power, the Pick-Up Artist! Power, thanks for joining us.

ANDREW (V.O.)
(bright)
Thanks for having me.

TALK SHOW HOST (V.O.)
Our open forum topic: "How do Selfies impact your self-image?"

ANDREW (V.O.)
Am I with a girl in them?

TALK SHOW HOST (V.O.)
(chuckles)
You may be. Let's go to the phones-

Craig jabs the power button. All goes silent, just the RUMBLE of road noise, and the FUMING of his own breath.

He rolls down the window, and looks OUTSIDE--

THE BLOCK lined with the occasional BAR or CLUB, with costumed ANDREW DISCIPLES (20s-30s) milling around outside.

Craig's jaw hangs.

EXT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT BALCONY - NIGHT

Craig leans against the balcony railing, from a small patio table, he grabs a colorfully-decorated plastic cup that clearly belongs to Callie, and takes a sip.

He looks down, and for the first time we see Craig's apartment isn't terribly high off...

THE GROUND

Where he can see one local CLUB swamped with Andrew's Disciples. Still, they look small, toylike from Craig's vantage point.

CRAIG

Sets the cup back down. Looks to his other hand, where he's been absentmindedly twirling Brenda's card.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / CRAIG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Craig opens his wardrobe, sees just how little's left since he ditched his Finesse costume bits.

He screws his face.

INT. BELLA CUCINA - NIGHT

Modest, to say the least. A hair on the tacky side. A WAITER lights a candle on one of many identical round tables, sitting next to a plastic vase holding a polyester flower.

Paintings that belong in dentists' offices, wallpaper that belongs in a Best Western. A PIANO PLAYER (40s) in a sequined dress sits at a minipiano, playing drippy, sedating music.

Craig leans by the end of the bar, his elbow resting next to a wicker basket full of fake grapes. Decent shirt. Decent
pants. Decent jacket (the one he wore when he met Rod). Nothing flashy.

He fidgets, spying the sizing sticker still clinging to the side of his leg. He rips it off, gives a glance around before surreptitiously hiding it beneath the grapes.

BRENDA appears from the foyer. Craig relaxes a slight bit; she's out of uniform, very recognizably a woman. Elegant, but still sturdy.

She locates him and weaves her way over.

CRAIG
Wow.

BRENDA
Wow?

He glances at her legs.

CRAIG
Skirt.

BRENDA
Yeah.

He notices the clutch under her arm.

CRAIG
Purse.

BRENDA
(chuckles)
Yeah.

CRAIG
Gun?

BRENDA
Not... This very instant.

CRAIG
Right.

He glances around the room, realizes that he and Brenda are the youngest of the entire clientele.

The NEAREST TABLE holds a HUSBAND and WIFE (60s). She's birdlike, silver-haired, daintily maneuvering her fork with her last two fingers raised idly.

He's portly, trying to negotiate spaghetti into his mouth, peering through aviator-framed bifocals. Sauce drips onto the napkin tucked into his collar.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I should probably admit, I just went hunting for somewhere with decent reviews. I've never been here before.

Brenda sees the married couple, smiles.

BRENDA
Really? You seemed like such a Matlock fan to me.

CRAIG
(chuckles)
These aren't Matlock fans.

BRENDA
No?

CRAIG
No, these are Columbo fans.

She laughs. He relaxes.

INT. BELLA CUCINA - LATER
Craig and Brenda occupy a table, splitting bread.

BRENDA
(continuing)
Grew up mostly in Arleta. Family moved to Van Nuys when I was thirteen-- Not much of a difference.

CRAIG
So, Valley Girl.

BRENDA
God, don't ever call me that.

CRAIG
Fair enough. Let me guess: You were the oldest.

BRENDA
Not even. Three older brothers. One little sister.

CRAIG
You were the oldest girl.

BRENDA
Nice try.

CRAIG
I figured you came from a big family.
She shrugs.

**BRENDA**
Yeah? Well, Dad got around.

His hands pause for a beat.

**CRAIG**
Just Dad?

**BRENDA**
Yeah. Two of those brothers are halves.

Craig grabs for the cocktail napkin near his drink.

**CRAIG**
Wait, wait-- I'm gonna need a pen... I think if I crunch the numbers, I'll be right.

She rolls her eyes, keeps an amused smile at bay.

**EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET – NIGHT**

Craig and Brenda stroll abreast, yellow sodium lamps and the neon of different restaurant and bar fronts shining on them. Craig continues an ongoing game of "Either-Or" questions.

**CRAIG**
Pepsi or Coke?

**BRENDA**
You know, I'm not big into soda. I'll do a Jarritos every now and then.

**CRAIG**
Stallone or Schwarzenegger?

**BRENDA**
Hmm...
(grins)
Robert Mitchum.

**CRAIG**
You can't keep doing that! This is a binary, here.

**BRENDA**
Alright, alright. I'll be good!

**CRAIG**
Okay. Valley or Downtown.

**BRENDA**
What, like I can never leave?
CRAIG
No, you just gotta live there.
Let's say rent's the same. Anywhere
in the Valley, or anywhere in LA
proper.

She slows, thinks. They hover outside a trendy COFFEE SHOP
where they can see a small BAND playing through the front
window.

BRENDA
I'd go with LA.

CRAIG
Yeah?

BRENDA
Yeah. You know, the city's gets a
bad rap, and it's... mostly
deserved...

CRAIG
I'm not offended.

BRENDA
Well, you know how it is. Hell, the
most expensive gas I ever bought
was at a Chevron right by Skid Row.

CRAIG
Shameless.

BRENDA
Yeah. LA's just shallow like that.
Totally oblivious, obsessed with
image. It's like the whole city's
one giant, horribly insecure kid.

CRAIG
And this is a draw?

BRENDA
Well, there's a "but...". Just like
giant, horribly insecure kid,
LA's only fake when it's playing to
a crowd.

CRAIG
As opposed to one-on-one?

BRENDA
Yeah, in a way. You stand at just
the right distance, at just the
right time of night, Downtown's
beautiful.

(beat)
There's this one bend, where the 10
meets the 110, that passes through
the bottoms of all those high-rises. And when there's no traffic, you're almost flying through all these lights. And it's almost like catching the town when it's calm, and not trying to impress anybody.

She looks to Craig, trying to read if he's going to interrupt. He looks back, entreats her to continue.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
You know, I have to be able to see the worst in everything, for the job. So, I'd want to come home to somewhere I can look out the window late at night, and just see what I see on that bend.

Craig blinks, suddenly taken by the little glints of reflected light in her eyes. It only lasts a moment, withdrawn before Brenda can recognize his gaze.

CRAIG
You sure you're a cop?

BRENDA
Why?

CRAIG
Because you're-- Name a poet.

BRENDA
Uh... Edgar Allen Poe.

CRAIG
Different poet.

BRENDA
Eliot? T.S. Eliot?

CRAIG
Sure. You're the T.S. Eliot of cops.

BRENDA
(chuckles)
Thanks.

They share a smile for a beat. Craig starts to notice the music, and looks up through the window and

INSIDE THE COFFEE SHOP

A jazz trio on the bandstand. On bass: DUANE.

CRAIG
Oh, shit!
BRENDA
What?

CRAIG
(Re: Duane)
I know him. He's a-- old friend.

BRENDA
You wanna go say hi?

Craig studies Duane. He's at total ease, walking his bass with none of the demureness that used to weigh him down.

CRAIG
Sure.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Duane, a lanky PIANIST (40s) and a stocky DRUMMER (50s) play for a modest crowd. Craig and Brenda enter, hovering by the counter rather than venturing deeper.

Duane starts a SOLO, his hand flying between plucking the strings and percussively CLACKING against the body of the bass. As he finishes, APPLAUSE breaks out.

Craig looks around the room. Clapping for Duane, sitting alone at a small table: NICOLE, the REDHEAD.

Craig instantly looks ill. There's no mistaking her.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / KITCHEN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Craig stands over Nicole. She's lying on her side on the linoleum. She's DISHEVELED, her eyes are WATERY, her nose is BLEEDING.

APPLAUSE still sounds off.

Brenda stands next to Craig. She's still seeing the Coffee Shop, where Craig's seeing his apartment.

BRENDA
You okay?

Craig blinks.

END FLASHBACK.

Craig recovers, sees the Coffee Shop again. The applause dies down, the band launches back into the melody and finishes.

CRAIG
Yeah. Fine.
The band steps down, Duane catching Craig in his eyes. He walks over. Nicole stands, steps beside Duane. Their fingers lace.

DUANE
Craig!

CRAIG
Hey, Duane.

DUANE
Been a while, man! Nicole, this is Craig, and...

Brenda extends her hand to Duane, then Nicole.

BRENDA
Brenda.

Introductions exchanged all around, the Pianist flags Duane over to another TABLE, where sit a few JAZZ HEADS.

DUANE
Be right back.

He drops a light peck on Nicole's cheek, and breaks away. Craig and Brenda pull up spare chairs at Nicole's table.

NICOLE
He'll just be a sec. Talking to his band friends. So, how do you know Duane?

CRAIG
Uhm... I'm sorry, have-- Have we met before?

NICOLE
I don't think so. Have we?

CRAIG
You sure?

NICOLE
(chuckles)
Uh... Pretty sure, yeah.

Duane reappears for a beat.

DUANE
You guys want anything?

NICOLE
Yeah, I'll go for one of the lemon bars.

DUANE
Sure.
(to Brenda, Craig)
Anything?

Craig rises.

CRAIG
I'll case the menu with you.

BRENDA
Hey, they have any of those little French sandwich cookies, here?

NICOLE
Macarons?

BRENDA
Yeah.

CRAIG
I'll see what they got.

MOMENTS LATER, BY THE COUNTER

Craig leans against the glass case of baked goods. Modest pickin
gs, this late at night. Duane stands nearby, skimming the overhanging blackboard menu.

Duane's voice goes hushed.

DUANE
Had to get out, man. Once you split, things got ugly with that Andrew kid, fast.

CRAIG
Yeah?

DUANE
Yeah. He started bringing in all these young guys, and they all had all this anger... They started getting into taking trophies. Mostly cell phone pictures, but this one guy rolled up with a bunch of panties he said he'd stolen from every girl he closed with.

CRAIG
(grimaces)
Christ...

DUANE
Yeah. Wish you'd told me you were getting out.

CRAIG
I'm sorry, Duane.
DUANE
Hey, maybe it's better I found out myself.

He glances over to NICOLE and BRENDA. They're laughing, chatting amicably, as if it were the easiest thing in the world for them.

DUANE (CONT'D)
She's in med school. She's quiet, but get her going, and she's smart. Scary smart.

CRAIG
She's a detective. Gonna be, anyway.

DUANE
(smirks)
Better not try and pull any shit past her.

CRAIG
Shit, man, we're so out of our depth...

DUANE
Nah. Just means we gotta tread water a little harder, is all. You know, I don't worry about Jen anymore.

Craig lights up, he's earnest.

CRAIG
That's great, Duane.

DUANE
Better late than never, right? You know, it's crazy... I remember being a kid, and even when I was eight years old, it's like someone was always telling me, that the most important thing, was how well you could get women.

CRAIG
"Get", as in...?

DUANE
As in "Pull".

CRAIG
As in "Fuck".

Duane nods. A BARISTA behind the counter puts a plate holding a lemon bar on top of the glass case. Duane takes it, stands expecting the next bit of his order.
DUANE
Yeah. Everybody wants you to fuck women, but nobody seems to care whether or not you like them.

(beat)
It's almost like they prefer if you don't.

Craig pauses, thinks.

TABLE, LATER

Empty cups, dishes strewn with crumbs. Laughter. Brenda launches into a story, the group on a tangent about their of funny Dad stories.

BRENDA
If the poverty line was the roof of a house, my dad grew up in the basement. So, even though we could totally afford to turn on the A/C, he wouldn't, just because it was so instilled in him to pinch pennies whenever he could. And we lived in the hottest part of the Valley.

DUANE
Oh, man!

BRENDA
So I start my freshman year of high school in late August. So, hottest part of town, hottest part of summer, and the guy would just sweat all day.

Nicole snickers in anticipation.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
And he worked nights. So as the days would get hotter, I'd keep coming home from school and finding him in progressively less clothes. And I love my dad, but he is ninety percent gut.

CRAIG
Beer gut?

BRENDA
See the thing is, he doesn't even drink. So it's just this half-dome bulge on him. He's literally shaped like a pregnant man.

They all sputter, laugh.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
So it goes from shirt and shorts, to wifebeater and shorts, to wifebeater and boxers, and I come home with three of my girlfriends, on the day he'd lost the wifebeater.

Bigger laughter.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
...And switched to briefs. Just a six-foot-four pregnant man in tighty-whities, asking where the remote was.

NICOLE
At least it wasn't a day later!

The laughter reaches a small crescendo, then subsides. Eyes go to Craig: his turn.

CRAIG
Okay, let's see... My dad was very... status-oriented-- I'll put it that way. And I was probably about five or six, and my dad had this huge party going on for all his work friends, and clients and everything, and my mom was really sick at the time.

BRENDA
With what?

CRAIG
Uh, cancer. Yeah. Breast cancer. So, I was walking around the house, trying to find my mom. And she-- You know this must've been after her...

He searches for the word, makes a knifelike motion with the side of his hand near his chest.

NICOLE
Mastectomy?

CRAIG
Yeah. Leave it to the med student, right? So, my dad wasn't really around her all that often.

Craig's speech slows, he starts to realize what he's saying, and how it all sounds.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
So I go into her bedroom, where she's sleeping. And before I can
talk to her, my dad pulls me out, because he didn't want to draw anybody's attention to her, lying sick upstairs.

An awkward beat.

DUANE
Jesus, I'm sorry...

CRAIG
What? No, I-- God, I'm sorry, guys. I didn't want to kill the mood.

BRENDA
No, it's fine, it's fine.

DUANE
How's your mom now?

CRAIG
She... She went pretty fast, after that.

Brenda's hand moves to touch his. He locks eyes with her.

EXT. BRENDA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Craig and Brenda make toward the stoop. She stops, turns to face him. A checkpoint for whether the night will continue or not.

BRENDA
Did you wanna come up?

CRAIG
Come up? Up to your place?

BRENDA
Yeah.

CRAIG
You sure? We don't--really--know each other.

BRENDA
Yeah, but I trust you. You're a good guy...

Craig suddenly looks pained.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
Unless there's something you're not telling me, here...

CRAIG
Like what?
Like you’re not a good guy.

He smirks. Thinks for a beat.

Lead the way.

They enter.

INT. BRENDA'S APARTM - NIGHT

Usually tidy, but situationally mistrewn. Lots of photos of friends, family. A yoga mat sits unfurled between the coffee table and the TV.

Craig and Brenda enter, she flicks on the lights.

(re: mat)
Yoga?

Trying it. I don't think it's for me.

He lowers himself into lying on the mat.

Let's see if I can still...

He hoists his body up into a neck bridge; his feet and the top of his head forming a tripod supporting his elevated torso. He holds it.

Impressive. Gymnast?

I wrestled. In high school.

Yeah?

Yeah. I had a full scholarship to Brown from it. Tore my ACL.

Oh, Jesus.

Well, tearing it wasn't that bad. What really sucked was re-tearng it.
BRENDA
How'd that happen?

He lowers himself back down, lies supine.

CRAIG
Got stupid. When I was in PT I started panicking about losing my edge. Tried to train at home... Second time around, I was lucky to still be able to walk.

He rises to his feet.

BRENDA
You don't go easy on yourself, do you?

He snickers. She steps closer to him.

CRAIG
Guess not.

She steps closer. Now within spitting distance. Craig breathes like he's dragging on a cigarette.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Has this all just been a ploy to get me up here?

She rolls her eyes, but still moves closer.

BRENDA
Don't flatter yourself.

Her lips meet his. They hold for a moment, then he breaks away.

CRAIG
Wait...

BRENDA
What?

CRAIG
I'm sorry. I'm not a good guy.

BRENDA
Oh?

CRAIG
I-- I teach guys how to trick women into sleeping with them. That's what I do. For work. Or--I used to.

She drifts back about a half-step.

BRENDA
Why're you telling me this now?

CRAIG
Because I think I'd rather be, you know, decent, for a change.

BRENDA
Do you usually trick girls into sleeping with you?

CRAIG
I don't know...

BRENDA
Is this how you thought you knew Nicole?

He's silent. Her voice gets a tiny bit harsher.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
What do you mean by "trick", anyway?

He sighs, resigned. He pulls the Playbook 2.0 from the deep end of the pocket he stuffed it in and hands it to her.

She flips through a few pages, her brow furrowing.

CRAIG
I couldn't stand living with my dad. I moved out, didn't have a plan, got a job as a bar-back while I was taking some acting classes. Met this guy who was selling this book--He got me in on it. Slapped my face on the cover after he retired, and I was selling it ever since.

She turns the cover toward him, points to Andrew.

BRENDA
Who's your friend?

CRAIG
The Antichrist, as far as I know. I think...

(beat, tense)
I think he raped Nicole. And tried to pin it on me.

She goes silent. Her eyes widen.

BRENDA
You "think"?

CRAIG
I can't remember.
BRENDA
What the fuck do you mean, you can't remember?

CRAIG
You don't believe me.

BRENDA
Can you blame me? You just told me you teach manipulation, professionally. Craig, do you know what "Mandated Reporter" means? I can't have this...

She forces the book back into Craig's hands.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
You say any more to me, and legally, I have to report it. And despite whatever you may, or may not have done-- Your name is the one I have to report.

CRAIG
Brenda...

BRENDA
I'm sorry. You should go now.

He stares. Tries to search for something to say, and comes up empty. He turns for the door.

CRAIG
For what it's worth, I still had a good time tonight.

He looks to her. Her face softens a bit as he closes the door.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT - DAY

Craig stands before the balcony window, cell phone to his ear.

ANDREW (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
I have fucking missed you, man! How you been?

CRAIG
(into phone)
We need to talk.

ANDREW (V.O.)
Oh, totally! Totally, man! You should come to the new office!
CRAIG
Where's that?

Andrew CACKLES. His voice seems to have become faster, harsher, and raised a tiny mark in pitch.

ANDREW (V.O.)
(singing)
"Bright light city, gonna set my soul-- Gonna set my soul on fire!"

EXT. CRAIG'S CAR ON I-15 - DUSK
JUST OUTSIDE BAKER, CA

Craig grips his steering wheel, speeds along the straight shot of freeway as dark orange light fills the sky.

ANDREW (V.O.)
(singing)
Vivaaa! Vivaaaaa!

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT

Neon shining down. Craig walks the block, stiff-legged after the six hour drive.

PROMOTERS on either side of him hand out glossy cards for strip clubs, call girls. Eventually he has to put his hand up to awkwardly signal a pass to one that juts a card at him with increased fervor.

INT. TOWER HOTEL / LOBBY - NIGHT

Glass and marble molded into ultra-modern opulence. Craig enters, walking a long corridor to an expansive room, where a large, circular front desk stands in the center, manned by a trio of CONCIERGES.

A group of four men, recognizable as some of Andrew's DEVOTEES walks in. Craig watches them cross to the elevators, and follows. In the--

ELEVATOR

He stands in the far corner, the Devotees casting odd glances towards his clothes. He doesn't look like one of them, but he's not asking for them to hit the button for any other floor. They ride up.

INT. TOWER HOTEL / PENTHOUSE LEVEL - NIGHT
The elevator opens, instantly, DANCE MUSIC blares and thumps from behind a single-doored wall.

Craig walks behind Andrew's Devotees as they meet a bulky, black-suited BOUNCER (30s), and a HOSTESS (20s) reading off the guest list.

Their speech is muffled by the music. One of the Devotees holds up four fingers, asserting the size of their party. The Bouncer lets them pass, and through the door, Craig just barely catches a glimpse of multicolored flashing lights.

The Hostess addresses Craig. Her makeup's gaudy, bits of her anatomy stand out as clearly after-market additions. She's a local. She speaks loudly, over the music.

HOSTESS
Name?

Craig thinks for a beat. Another one of Andrew's Devotees, one from another group, stumbles out of the door and to the elevator, a flash of noise and light behind him as the door swings.

CRAIG
Try Schevel, Craig.

She searches.

HOSTESS
Not here.

Another Devotee steps out to follow his friend. The door slowly swings back to its closed position.

CRAIG
How about "Finesse"?

He spells it out for her.

HOSTESS
I'm afraid not.

The Bouncer steps a bit closer.

ZACH
Finesse!

Zach pokes his head out from the door.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Hey, I thought that was you! Come on, man!

Zach looks to the Bouncer and the Hostess, nods: "He's cool". The Bouncer steps aside.

HOSTESS
(half-hearted)
Enjoy.

Zach leads Craig into...

INT. TOWER HOTEL / ANDREW'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Retrofitted into his own private club. Lights everywhere, a projector hooked up to a DJ booth. And true to form, awash in a massive crowd.

All DEVOTEEs, some in the standard costume, some dressed in less trademark fare, apparently new additions to the fold. They don't dance, though. They mill around, casting eyes towards the DANCERS, WAITRESSES, and other assorted CLUB GIRLS (20s) all placed there like stocked fish in a man-made creek.

ZACH
Come on, I'll take you to Power!

Zach leads the way through the crowd, toward a far wall LINED WITH MIRRORS. Craig glances around.

A DEVOTEE reaches into his jacket pocket. He makes eyes with the nearest BOUNCER, who turns around so the Devotee can produce a small bag of coke and cut out a line, with plausible deniability.

A WAITRESS in a skintight faux-leather dress serves drinks to a pair of FRAT BOY-TYPES (20s), who have a vaguely un-bathed look about them, despite the flashy clothing. They make no effort to hide their gaze zeroed-in on her cleavage.

A pair of YOUNG EXECUTIVES (30s) stand near one of the bars, surreptitiously exchanging between them a wad of bills for some small, white pills.

Craig's eyes narrow. He reacquires Zach, keeps following. Another look around and he sees the Devotees making increasingly physical, line-toeing advances towards the Girls.

The club-goer Girls, the ones who were simply promised a party and not there working-- keep looking smaller, more fragile, younger.

One of the girls, a BRUNETTE (20) tries to recoil, as a DEVOTEE (late 30s) leans in toward her, cornering her by a bar, and lets his hand ride on her hip. She glances around the room, as if for help.

And for a tiny fraction of a second, her eyes meet Craig's. She looks like Callie. Her looks of unease becomes his.

INT. PENTHOUSE / ANDREW'S OFFICE FRONT ROOM - NIGHT
Zach leads Craig to a set of couches and bids him to sit.

**ZACH**
Let me go grab him.

Zach disappears past the next door. All's quiet for a beat, just the _THUMPING_ and _RUMBLING_ of the bass leaking in from the main room.

Zach reappears, waves Craig in.

**INT. PENTHOUSE / ANDREW'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Andrew. His hat's bigger. His jacket bulkier and denser. His jewelry bigger and gaudier, with an edgy aesthetic that makes him look like a Goth version of Mr. T.

His look hasn't gotten more refined or better-crafted, just bigger and louder. His face glistens a tiny bit, as if constantly with a fine layer of sweat over him.

He smokes from a massive hookah sitting next to him, behind his desk. A leggy WAITRESS (30s) comes by to adjust the hot coals with a pair of tongs, before making for the door.

Brock sits at one of the couches, thick cigar in his mouth.

Craig stands a few feet from the door. The Waitress leaves with Zach.

Andrew takes a long, dramatized drag off his hookah, then pops to his feet. His smile is wide, toothy. He spreads his arms as he walks to Craig.

**ANDREW**
My man!

He wraps his arms around Craig, who stands loosely, awkwardly. Andrew squeezes, then suddenly retracts.

**ANDREW (CONT'D)**
Alright, alright! Sheesh! Any longer and people'd get the wrong idea about me!

He turns to Brock and CACKLES at his own joke, signalling Brock to join. Craig stays stonefaced. Andrew steps back, spreads his arms again.

**ANDREW (CONT'D)**
What do you think?

**CRAIG**
Your dad's place?

**ANDREW**
For now. Good guess! I'm gonna make him an offer to take it off his hands. Grown really attached to the place. But that's not what I meant.

Andrew gestures again, this time more clearly toward his torso.

CRAIG

What?

ANDREW
I'm down like, seven percent body fat! Gotta look the part, right? Check it out!

Andrew skips over to his desk and pulls an unmarked pill bottle out of a drawer. He rattles it in his hand, showing off a cache of yellow caplets.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
DNP! I got a guy who hooks it up now. Gets me Tren and Test, too.

CRAIG
He sets you up with roids?

ANDREW
I get dudes laid for a living, Craig. I can pretty much get my hands on anything, these days.

He reaches for another drawer.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
You want some coke?

CRAIG
I'm good.

ANDREW
Ya' sure?

Craig's silent.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Suit yourself! So...

CRAIG
I want to talk business.

ANDREW
What business, Craig? I'm the business.

Craig speaks forcefully.

CRAIG
The Redhead business. The blackmail business.

Andrew swallows.

ANDREW
Brock, blow.

Brock nonchalantly puffs some more on his cigar, then rises for the door. He shoulder-checks Craig as he walks out. Andrew resumes, once the two have their privacy.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
What do you want to bring that up for? I've been quiet. Just like I promised. Nobody knows about the Ginger chick...

CRAIG
Her name's Nicole. She's gonna be a doctor.

ANDREW
Cool story, bro.

CRAIG
You never had anything on me.

ANDREW
Oh? You didn't sound so sure of that before...

CRAIG
Which means that was you in your little video, you twisted, depraved little grub.

Andrew's brow furrows. He stares defiantly.

ANDREW
You know, you should like me.

CRAIG
I don't.

He nods to the door, to the noise and the Bacchanalia behind it.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
And neither do they. You're obvious, Andrew. I don't care how many people buy what you hawk, I don't care how much you dress yourself up as somebody else's character. Everyone knows what you are.

Andrew scowls, at a loss for a comeback.
CRAIG (CONT'D)
So since that's out there, here's my deal: You want the company It's yours. I'll sign everything to you. Your name on every relevant scrap of paper. You get to start convincing people that you invented all this, instead of stole it.

(beat)
But you erase me. You don't get to sell my name or my likeness. You strip me from every copy of the book, the website, everything. It's all yours, and I was never here.

Andrew's breath gets heavier, more aggressive.

A KNOCK. Zach pokes his head in again.

ZACH
Mr. Waltigan, Power.

ANDREW
Good!

Andrew rises. Zach opens the door and lets in BRADLEY WALTIGAN (60s), gray-haired, almost carved out of granite. Trailing him is the doughy, tweed-clad FLEISCHER (50s), toting a brief case.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Dad! Sit down! You want a drink?

WALTIGAN
(stony)
I'm going home, Andrew.

ANDREW
Huh? Oh, sure. What'd you think, though?

Waltigan sighs.

WALTIGAN
This is shit.

Andrew's face doesn't drop. It tilts, confused.

WALTIGAN (CONT'D)
It's shit, boy. I'm not signing the house over so you can do more of this garbage. You've got guys snorting dope in plain sight, grabbing on the girls-- This is a Goddamn embarrassment. I'm going home, and this better all be gone in the morning.
Andrew's silent, shocked. Waltigan turns and makes for the door, his head hangs a bit, he rubs his forehead as he leaves, weary. Fleischer follows. Andrew's "War face" flashes.

ANDREW
Fleischer?

Waltigan disappears beyond the door. Fleischer turns. Andrew glances to Craig.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
While you're still here, can you put together a... Transfer of Title-type thing? I'll double your retainer.

Fleischer steps back toward Andrew, undoing a latch on his case.

ANDREW'S OFFICE, LATER

Craig looks thumbs through the end of a contract. Finally, he sets it down on the coffee table near the couches, and signs. Fleischer snatches the contract up, and locks it into his briefcase. He nods and exits.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Satisfied?

CRAIG
Not really. Present company, you know?

ANDREW
You should like me.

Andrew steps around Craig, eyeing him.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I'm everything you said to be. If I'm so fucking bad, Craig, you're just as bad--you're the same kind of bad--as me.

CRAIG
You roofied me.

ANDREW
And it wasn't fucking cheap, getting that shit from those frat guys. And I spiked both of you. But I didn't just hear you mentioning the girl now, did I? Didn't care about her just then, huh? Nice moral fucking high ground.
Andrew crosses to a few large windows, (the other side of the previously-seen MIRRORS) and draws the blinds. The whole of the dance floor space opens up to him. He gestures grandiosely.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
But that's always the last refuge of somebody who's been trumped. Look! Look at them all! I've got them all armed, man! I've given them what they all want! You played it so it was always about you. I serve them. You gave them the self-help bullshit. I gave them high-octane access to top-shelf pussy.

He paces, wipes the sweat from his brow. He vigorously jabs his index finger toward himself. He gets emphatic, overly enunciative.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
The show's going through, gonna be on national television. I took your Tony Robbins-ass lemonade stand, and turned it into Starbucks. It's gonna be on every street corner! Did you get it there, Craig? No, I did. I made it, where you failed. I'm the fucking better man, I am the Twenty-First Century! I'm the fucking Scarface of cool!

CRAIG
Yeah? How'd that end up for Scarface?

ANDREW
(mocking, in total unison)
How'd that end up for Scarface?

Andrew grins.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Gotcha!

Craig stares.

CRAIG
I'm leaving, Andrew.

ANDREW
Bullshit. You're gonna admit it, or you're going nowhere. I'm the better man.

CRAIG
I don't know what the hell you are, Andrew. I'm not even convinced you're human, at this point. But you're definitely not a "man".

Andrew frowns, he strolls over to his desk, and hovers over the computer. He makes a few clicks, then spins the monitor around to face Craig.

ANDREW
You see this? This is my proof.

ON SCREEN: A full library of VIDEO FILES, all showing single still-frame previews of their contents:

VARIOUS GIRLS, in different stages of undress, many with fresh BRUISES, BLOODY NOSES and MOUTHS, TEARS.

ANDREW'S HANDS, and more, grip them, BASH THEM, invade them. A growing homemade porn collection of varying levels of violence.

Andrew grins. Craig turns pale.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Half don't remember. The other half remember that I'm not to be fucked with.

He cocks his head.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
It's good to be the king. Remember that.

Andrew steps away from the screen, standing awkwardly, as if he wants to take a bow. After a beat, he turns away to resume his seat behind the desk. He hits an intercom button on the phone set.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
(into intercom)
Getting bored here. Bring me something.

DEVOTEE (V.O.)
(over intercom, filtered)
White meat or dark meat?

ANDREW
(into intercom)
Two white. For now.
(to Craig)
Don't let the door hit you in the ass, Craig.

Craig makes for the door, gritting his teeth.
INT. TOWER HOTEL / ANDREW'S PENTHOUSE – LATER

Craig's already about halfway for the door, when his pace slows. He wants nothing more than to leave, but he can't. He stands awkwardly in the middle of the room, then crosses over to slump down in one of the couches.

He lets his head sit in his hands. A VOICE grabs his concentration.

A two SCRAWNY DEVOTEE (20s) occupy the immediately adjacent couches, their conversation loud enough for Craig to hear. They're strategizing, thumbing through their own copy of the Playbook.

SCRAWNY DEVOTEE 1
Nah, dude, Marty's doing a DHV for us, so we can grab another set and merge them forward and get some Jealousy Subplots going. These tourist bitches always fall for it! Power's guys stock this place good.

A light goes off behind Craig's eyes. He cranes his neck over.

CRAIG
Excuse me.

SCRAWNY DEVOTEE 1
Yeah?

CRAIG
Which one's of your boys' Marty?

They nod toward a TALL SCRAWNY DEVOTEE (20s) holding court with a few PETITE GIRLS (20s), all seemingly taken by his stature.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
You guys got your Marks?

SCRAWNY DEVOTEE 2
Of course. What, we look like noobs to you?

SCRAWNY DEVOTEE 1
We got the chick in the green, and the blonde one with the big ass.

CRAIG
Well, your boy Marty was going tactile with them both a little while earlier.

Their eyes bulge.

SCRAWNY DEVOTEE 2
You bullshitting?

CRAIG
No, man. He bet the blonde that he could fit her ass in his hand. She seemed impressed. Dude's got big hands.

The first Scrawny Devotee glances at his own, rather diminutive hands. He screws his face.

SCRAWNY DEVOTEE 1
That son of a bitch!

They both rise and head back across the floor. Craig stands and sets off in a different direction.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

The night goes on, more drinking, cavorting. Craig slips through the crowd, stopping every so often to throw in a small aside into a DEVOTEE's ear. The MUSIC blares, covering up the dialogue.

A) One of the FRAT BOYS from earlier crosses the floor with a new beer in hand. Craig seemingly says half a sentence as he passes, the Frat Boy stops in his tracks, then glares ahead at an off-screen acquaintance.

B) Two of the YOUNG EXECUTIVES lean by the far wall, chatting with a pair of YOUNGISH GIRLS. Craig slips by, pointing vaguely over his shoulder and asking some question. The Executives glance at each other with some common shock.

C) The two Scrawny Devotees corner their taller friend, tear him away from the girls, start aggressively interrogating him, punctuating their questions with shoves.

D) One Frat Boy is already sharing loud, harsh words with his friend. The GIRLS they were presumably targeting awkwardly back away.

E) The two Executives corner Brock, in the middle of trying to close on two Girls of his own. They stare daggers at him, and Brock looks back, oblivious.

INT. ANDREW'S OFFICE

Andrew stands over a DRUGGED GIRL (20s) lying on the couch. Her dress disheveled, her purse lying on the floor, its contents, including a vibrating CELL PHONE strewn all around.

Andrew kicks the cell phone to the side, steps ever closer to the Girl, his hands drifting toward his belt buckle.

A sudden loud CRUNCH of glass breaks his concentration.
ANDREW
What the fuck?!

A spiderweb of CRACKS has appeared on his one-way mirror window, a GLASS having flown. Andrew steps to the window and looks out--

IN THE MAIN SECTION of the penthouse...

Pandemonium. Across the floor, shoving matches, lapel-grabbing, brutally unrelenting drunken fistfights-- the Bouncers try to break up Andrew's savage devotees where they can, but their numbers, and their influence are limited.

The Girls try to stand clear of the chaos, many rushing for the exit. Zach stands by, shocked.

Bock's meanwhile in the middle of choking out one of the Executives in a headlock, while the other comes up from behind and bashes Brock with the bottom of a pilsner glass.

Andrew steps out of his office, hollering at the top of his lungs, but barely audible. He flags down Zach and a Bouncer, and storms across the floor.

Craig slips into the office, out of Andrew's sight.

INT. ANDREW'S OFFICE

Craig enters, finding the Drugged Girl trying to fight her way to her feet. He grabs the cell phone off the floor, hits the answer button, and holds it for the Drugged Girl.

FEMALE VOICE
(over phone, filtered)
Katie? Katie? Where are you?

The Drugged Girl MUMBLES INCOHERENTLY. Craig puts the phone to his own ear. Speaks up over the NOISE from the main room coming over the line.

CRAIG
In the office. Hurry.

He grabs all of the personal effects from the floor and stuffs them back into the Girl's purse. Her female CLUBBING FRIEND (20s) staggers in on impossible heels. Craig hands her the purse.

CLUBBING FRIEND
Katie? Come on, girl.

DRUGGED GIRL
(slurring)
I'm comin'.
Craig shoulders the Drugged Girl's arm, hoists her up. She can stand, somewhat. He helps her Friend support her and lead her back out.

CRAIG
Get her to a hospital.

CLUBBING PARTNER
She's not that drunk.

CRAIG
Yeah, she's worse.

The two girls drag their way back out.

Through the WINDOW

Craig sees them hug the far wall, making a clean break to the exit. Andrew meanwhile viciously berates the closet Bouncers.

A BURLY DEVOTEE (30s) takes a drunken swing at one Bouncer, and soon enough a dogpile swarms around him, wrestling him to the floor.

Craig turns to ANDREW'S DESK.

He steps to the computer, starts searching through the drawers: coke, assorted pills, handcuffs, a few knives, some totally-disorganized papers and office supplies, even five still boxed models of the exact same smart phone.

Finally, Craig finds something sufficient: a small USB FLASH DRIVE. He inserts it into Andrew's computer, then searches for the folder of video files.

He finds it, dumps the whole contents into the USB drive.

ON SCREEN: a LOADING BAR, reading "Copying..."

Another CRUNCH. Craig ducks behind the desk, PANTING nervously.

He looks to the window: another bunch of CRACKS from another thrown glass. Craig looks back to the SCREEN.

In the grid of video files, he sees NICOLE.

He stares.

Then, nervously, he CLICKS.

ON SCREEN:

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT
From the view of Andrew's cell phone camera:

Andrew places the camera's lens with a blurry, dark view of the apartment. Craig's hands suddenly fly up, momentarily blocking the view.

    CRAIG
    (slurring)
    What's goin' on?

    ANDREW
    (hushed)
    Shut up! Stay still, man!

Craig's hands drop. He's sitting on the couch. The camera's in his shirt pocket. Andrew steps out, his body out of view of the camera. He pivots Craig to face downward, the camera's gaze hanging over the drugged NICOLE, lying on the ground.

    ANDREW (CONT'D)
    (sotto)
    Okay...

Andrew's hand's move in, start assailing Nicole.

    CRAIG
    (slurring)
    Wha...?

BACK TO SCENE: ANDREW'S OFFICE

Craig stares at the screen, wide-eyed. A sudden sound of STRUGGLE from Nicole, and his hand jabs for the MUTE button. He continues to watch, growing ever more pained as he watches.

His hand clamps over his mouth, shocked. He starts to sob. He tries to hold it back, but that quickly proves futile. The chaos rages on in the main space of the penthouse, and Craig's face reddens with the strain.

ON SCREEN: Andrew, his business finished, pulls the camera out of Craig's pocket, turns it to face him.

THE VIDEO GOES DARK.

The loading bar fills, COMPLETED.

Craig gasps, collects himself. He snatches the USB drive out of the computer.

INT. TOWER HOTEL / ANDREW'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

A small squad of Las Vegas police, METROS (30s-40s) swarm into the penthouse, shining flashlights and blowing
whistles. A pair storm for the DJ table to cut off the music.

Craig steps out of the office, hand over his pocket, holding the USB drive tight in there.

He walks through the room, as if climbing out of the layers of Hell.

First, the dead center of the scrap, Andrew hollering as Brock bashes one of the Executive's heads into the floor.

Then, a few Bouncers tangling with the Frat Boys and other, burlier members of he clique.

Then, the outer core, where the Scrawny Devotees and the younger and softer members of Andrew's cult have it out.

Then, a layer of more Bouncers just coming into the fray.

The Metros on the outer Bouncers' heels, unholstering pepper spray and batons.

Past them: the Women, the Hostesses and Waitresses and hired Dancers and the Club Girls—who this whole debacle was supposed to all be about. Craig bolts among them for the door.

INT. TOWER HOTEL / PENTHOUSE LEVEL - NIGHT

Craig and a few Dancers BURST out of the door into the level just outside of the penthouse proper. Craig pauses, catches his breath, as ever more of the Girls, and some of Andrew's followers spill out.

The elevators taking too long to respond, most head for the stairwell, Craig turns, and follows, his limp coming back by a half-measure.

EXT. CRAIG'S CAR ON I-15 - NIGHT

DESERT. Craig speeds along, seeing more STARS over his car than he ever has before.

INT. BRENDA'S APARTMENT - DAY

A KNOCK. Brenda opens the door to find a slightly-haggard Craig. He holds up the USB drive.

CRAIG
Got you something to report.

DISSOLVE TO:
INT. COUNTY COURTROOM – DAY

Trial in full swing. Andrew sits fidgeting next to Fleischer on the defense, in an ill-fitting powder-blue suit.

Craig and Brenda sit in the gallery, alongside Duane, Nicole, and a few interspersed YOUNG WOMEN with nervous, saddened looks all pointedly avoiding Andrew.

The DA (50s) stands from behind his table.

DA
Calling Mr. Craig Schevel.

Brenda, trying to be subtle, squeezes Craig's hand. He stands, crosses the bar to the witness stand. BALIFF swears him in. The DA steps into the well.

DA (CONT'D)
Please state your name.

Craig leans forward. For an instant, he makes contact with Andrew's twitching gaze.

CRAIG
Craig Schevel.

DA
And what is your occupation, Mr. Schevel?

Craig glances to Brenda.

INSERT SHOTS:

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM – DAY

The STAGE where we first saw Craig's speech. Empty chairs. Craig's boots step into frame.

CRAIG (V.O.)
I'm...

EXT. PARK – DAY

The playground where Craig took Callie, empty. A SWING shifts in the wind.

CRAIG (V.O.)
I'm...

BACK TO SCENE.

Craig searches his mind.
DA
Mr. Schevel?

INSERT SHOT:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

The school. Full of kids. Callie jogs up to Craig, who swoops her up in his arms. A brief moment of absolute, uninhibited joy.

BACK TO SCENE.

Craig looks up.

CRAIG
I'm a father.

CUT TO BLACK.