

Pandemonium, Splendidly Managed

by

Brett Conrad

Mike De Luca

CAA
424-288-2000

Magnet Management
424-208-7195

FADE IN:

INT. NEWS STUDIO - EVENING

CLOSE UP on COLIN WESTON, 43, as preened and manicured as can be. Meticulous hair, suit, and gaze. Too handsome for high Cronkite drama. Too much charm for national seriousness. He's local all the way.

WESTON

What are we talking about? We're talking about people that declare themselves leaders. They're asking something of us... they ask us to believe. Maybe the hardest thing possible. Do you believe in me? Do you want me?

(beat)

You're asking for a character judgement. You're asking for something both intimate and personal.

The voice from above. It almost comes from nowhere:

VOICE (O.C.)

That's great, Wes. Nice close. Take us home.

Weston pauses hard. The camera doesn't break. It yearns for his gleaming teeth to flash. Weston breaks right.

WESTON

Councilman Wyatt...

A 45-year-old basks in the local spotlight, however faux-humbly. A head tilt, a slight blush.

WESTON (CONT'D)

...in a political landscape riddled with paranoia, with injustice, with ennui... how do you pretend to represent the will of the people?

Councilman Wyatt doesn't hesitate a beat.

COUNCILMAN WYATT

Well, that's easy Colin. I don't pretend. I listen, and then I act.

WESTON

Do you have your sights on the governor's mansion?

COUNCILMAN WYATT

I opened an exploratory committee.

He smiles contentedly. Weston turns back to the camera.

WESTON

Councilman Gregory Wyatt, man of the people. I'm Colin Weston, and this has been a Local Profile. For Susan Sanchez and all of us here at KPTV, good night.

Theme music starts to play. Pleasant and familiar. The camera pulls out revealing co-anchor SUSAN SANCHEZ, 36, to Weston's right. They all grin and shuffle papers as the lights change and the camera swoops out. Councilman Wyatt smiles in the fading TV glow.

VOICE (O.C.)

Pulling out. You nailed it again, Wes. We're good in five, four...

Camera is back and we see the full newsroom studio for KPTV Phoenix, Channel 4. They wait for the all clear.

SUSAN SANCHEZ

Ennui?

WESTON

Means boredom.

SUSAN SANCHEZ

I don't think it does.

VOICE (O.C.)

...two, one... and we're clear.

Immediately Weston rears a fist back and DECKS Councilman Wyatt full on. Nearly knocks him out of his seat.

WESTON

You're such a lying sack of shit, Greg. I did you a fucking favor giving you this spot.

Wyatt is shocked stupid, hand to jaw.

COUNCILMAN WYATT

What the hell...?

Susan's eyes light up, more excited interest than worry.

SUSAN SANCHEZ

Holy shit!

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

PAUL DAVIS, 40, the voice in the sky, but really the handler, blanches with familiar annoyance.

DAVIS

Oh, Christ... Somebody! SOMEBODY!

(into a mic)

Stop Wes!

THROUGH THE GLASS BOOTH

To the far side of the set an intimidated young LINE PRODUCER motions hands out.

LINE PRODUCER (FROM MIC)

How?

DAVIS

Use a tranc gun!

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Weston looms over the stunned Councilman.

WESTON

You didn't say anything about the school zoning! You're double digits down in the polls.

(motions to studio)

This is like a Superbowl spot I gave you.

COUNCILMAN WYATT

You're out of your mind!

All the producers and grips are baffled. Weston bristles as Wyatt's handlers and the Line Producer come rushing out.

WESTON

I'm out of my mind!? I'm not the one out stumping for family values and then screwing my campaign manager while my postpartum wife's at home hiding in the closet.

All look aghast, including the foxy young campaign manager that helps Wyatt up.

WESTON (CONT'D)

(to the fox)

Yes, that would be you, sugar.

You're the king's whore.

Susan makes an audible laugh/gasp, covers her mouth.

COUNCILMAN WYATT
Is this because of the car?

The Line Producer pulls Weston back while Wyatt and his crew make to exit. Wyatt calls out over his shoulder.

COUNCILMAN WYATT (CONT'D)
The car was a piece of shit, Wes.

Davis has made it down, gazes at the end of the scene.

SUSAN SANCHEZ
Do you suppose he'll sue?

Davis doesn't budge. He makes a grumbling exasperation.

INT. WESTON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Weston slams the door and slumps down in his chair. It's a medium-nice office befitting a medium-big power player. The computer is one model down from the newest. The artwork doesn't break the bank.

Exasperated, Weston douses a rag and starts running it across his make-upped face. After two strokes he loses interest and tosses it aside.

He looks at his cluttered desk. Two BROCHURES are on top. "ELWOOD PRIVATE ACADEMY" is a glorious looking school campus. "BISHOP GALLWAY PRIVATE SCHOOL" is equally nice, and expensive-looking. He opens to the tuition section where previous scrawlings mark the page. The doodles encircle the cost and turn into a noose choking well-coiffed, stick figure Weston. Sharks nip at his feet. Planes drop bombs on him.

He turns the page to the back and sees a few happy young students. He tiredly extends his middle finger and tap, tap, taps it at them.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Davis, spin control on the brain, navigates the offices. His assistant POLLY, 27 and ultra efficient, catches pace.

POLLY
Holy shit, Paul.

DAVIS
Yeah.

POLLY
I mean, my God.

DAVIS
Yeah.

POLLY
She was screaming brimstone all the way to the limo.

DAVIS
Yeah.
(beat)
Who?

POLLY
The... king's whore.

Someone hands Davis some papers on the move. He doesn't look and Polly takes them from his hand and looks.

POLLY (CONT'D)
Oh...

DAVIS
He's lucky he's got the 25-54 demo.

POLLY
Paul...

DAVIS
Maybe his hairline starts to go he dips to second place in the market.

POLLY
His lawyer reached out.

DAVIS
Already, how's that possible?
They're still in the parking lot.

POLLY
No, Wes's. Contract renewal.

She holds up the document. Davis sighs.

DAVIS
Jesus.

He heads forward without blinking. Polly lets him go.

INT. WESTON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Weston is on the phone, waiting for the ring to pick up. Finally, to voicemail. He shakes his head, annoyed.

VOICE (ON PHONE)
This is Grevel. Leave me a message
and I'll get back to you.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Grev, it's Weston. Yeah, I know
it's late, but, what do you want,
these are my hours. What's the
word, man? Am I coming out west?
(a little desperate)
Am I giving out cash and prizes or
what? Already got my teeth capped.
(hates himself for it)
Give me a call back tomorrow.

He hangs up, reluctantly moves to another stack of papers on his desk. Invoices, bills, documents, but all with a big "WESTON/MARKS TOYOTA MILE OF CARS" logo on top.

He scans one list of numbers, comes to a final place where "-384,231.45" is highlighted. This causes his eyes to glaze over, so it's bad.

Finally, he leans back, looks around. Like he's barely keeping from screaming. He reaches into a desk drawer and pulls out a BOTTLE OF SCOTCH. A completely empty bottle.

He stares at it almost angrily. He unscrews the cap and takes a deep, full-bodied sniff. Like he's just coming out of the ocean for air. It tempers him. A little.

He leans back in his chair. A resigned sigh.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

A couple dozen people are gathered in a lecture-like setting. All have a kind of pained, desperate look about them.

MAN
...it was like I couldn't even
remember how I felt about things,
anything really, since before the
booze. The simplest things, morning
showers, can you believe that,
morning showers felt different.

Some grumbles in the seats. Weston sits with his face buried in his hand, eyes cast to the ground, he looks like he wants to kill himself. Or this guy.

MAN (CONT'D)
I hadn't had sober sex in almost
ten years.

Weston closes his eyes. Unbearable.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

A billboard for KPTV Action News Team is just off from a small park. Weston and Susan smile to the passing cars.

IN THE SMALL PARK ACROSS THE STREET dark hair dangles upsidedown. A KID of some kind. Can't see the face. A few others bum around in a desolate playground.

KID
I used to be able to do all sorts
of flips and shit. When I was
little.

The Kid hangs off a pull up bar by the knees. Hands reach in and tickle the Kid. A very girly yelp gives away the gender and she falls on her head.

BRAN, 16, the tickler, laughs. DAISY, 15, full of spunk, kicks at him from the ground.

DAISY
Dick. I could have hurt myself on
this fake granite spongey ground.

BRAN
Did you know back in olden times
they used actual granite instead?
Not ouch-proof fake ground.

He flops on the "ground" next to her, all teenage romance cool.

BRAN (CONT'D)
Or wood chips. Peat moss.

DAISY
Shut up. Put your hands on me.

He does as told and they kiss. Starting to get into it and her phone chirps a text. Then another. Bummer, they know.

BRAN

Mrs. Weston, you have a lovely daughter.

She wriggles for her phone, plucks it from her pocket.

Text is from "MA-MAMA MAMA-MO-MA-MUM". It reads: "PAST CURFEW." The next text reads "YOU BETTER BE HERE BEFORE YOUR FATHER GETS HOME." Then a final text comes in. "YOUNG LADY."

DAISY

Daddy's done informing greater Phoenix about road closures and local heroic pet stories.

They look up at the billboard. He smiles down at her.

BRAN

I want to be him someday.

Such a jackass kid. A couple of their friends have climbed the scaffolding and taken out spray paint.

DAISY

Do NOT paint a cock on my dad's mouth!

They look back at her. Hands out, 'What, me?'

SPRAY PAINT KID

Just a little dick.

DAISY

Do it to her mouth.

Dutifully, the painters step right and get to work.

DAISY (CONT'D)

He wants to put me in Elwood. Or Gallway. Actually my mom does. Which means he has to.

BRAN

That's bullshit.

DAISY

She thinks you're gonna get me pregnant. I told her private school seed is way more potent.

She gets up, grabbing his balls on the way.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Weston stands in front of the group.

WESTON

All of you make me sick. Just being this close to you makes me wish my mother had drowned me at birth. You look for any reason in the world to explain away your faults except accountability. You even have the nerve to call your shortcomings a disease. People with MS or leukemia or glaucoma should take up arms against you for belittling their *unpreventable* affliction. No one forced you to chug your first banana daiquiri, you made that choice all by yourself. Disease, my ass. Call it what it is: weakness of character. Stop hiding behind political correctness. Look at that reflection of yours right in the stink eye and fess up. The powerlessness you cling to is as offensive as it is desperate. There's power to be had, you just don't know how to use it so it's easier to say 'Oh no, don't ask me. We are all powerless.' I can handle what I am but my main fear is if I brush up too close to one of you you're going to give me a case of crybaby.

(starts to sit; remembers)
Oh, my name is Colin W.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A Mercedes parks in front of a fairly nice building. The "WESTON/MARKS TOYOTA MILE OF CARS" logo is on the lip of the trunk, complete with a crude outline of Weston's smiling face. It's parked right next to a Toyota Prius, also with logo and smiling face. He glances at it, small cursory inspection. Leans in closer to the bottom of the driver's door. A few small scrapes. He fingers them, grinds his teeth before heading up the steps.

INT. APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens and a little yappy dog nips at him. 29-year-old MONA greets him with a smile and a kiss.

MONA

Baby...

WESTON

Oh my God, you smell nice.

MONA

What do I smell like?

WESTON

Freedom.

MONA

Go America.

WESTON

That's not what I meant.

Another kiss.

MONA

I know. I was ignoring the horribly
crass connotation.

WESTON

I need the Prius back. The shop is
going to inventory this weekend.

She looks almost ready to pout, but decides against it.

MONA

The keys are on the desk.

He paces through the well-furnished apartment.

WESTON

You get a chance to read, uh, edit
those book chapters I sent you?

MONA

Well, I could only read-uh-edit one
since that's all you sent.

WESTON

Really? I thought I had done a few.

MONA

Honestly, babe, you haven't even
done the one. It was practically
still just an outline. No real, you
know, narrative.

He sours as he picks up the Prius keys. On the desk she has a Word of the Day calender. Today's word was "ENNUI".

He peeks at tomorrow. "ANODYNE: NOT LIKELY TO PROVOKE DISSENT OR OFFENSE; INOFFENSIVE, OFTEN DELIBERATELY SO".

MONA (CONT'D)
So... what about next week?

WESTON
I don't know. I don't know if it's going to happen.

She comes up to him. He loves her in his arms, but he also look like he wants to get away.

MONA
I'm not under delusions. Okay? I'm not some sad mistress who pines for what is never coming.

WESTON
I know. It's what I like about you.

MONA
I'm sure it is. Makes it a lot easier for you. I've come to terms with my own badness in this little scenario of ours.

WESTON
So have I.

MONA
Super. Since we're both well-adjusted scoundrels then we don't ever have to dodge what we mean.
(beat)
I just want a vacation to LA.

He squirms away from her.

WESTON
And when I know, I'll tell you. I just got all this shit going on...

He's letting his stress slip out. She sees it, comes in again, soothing.

MONA
Don't worry. It'll all be fine.
You'll be fine.

She rubs on his earlobe. Bizarrely, it makes him feel better.

MONA (CONT'D)
Say it.

WESTON

Come on...

MONA

You come on.

A long beat, she stares at him, prodding. Finally, a voice comes out, amped up and full of showmanship.

WESTON

Get ready to roll, because this is Rock Solid.

He's uncertain but she smiles.

MONA

See, I'd fuck that guy. And that's what they want.

WESTON

...Yeah.

Another deep look. Of reassurance, hope, fear, lust, freedom, everything.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

Weston is behind the wheel, cruising the streets of Phoenix.

WESTON

...because this is Rock Solid.
Because this is Rooooock Solid.

He snarls a little at that one. At a light, he glances at teens at a bus stop. He locks eyes with one. A slight beat, he flashes a big smile. She scowls, 'fuck off creep'.

Unbothered, he looks ahead.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Get ready to roll... Geeeeet ready to roll.

He enunciates, always landing on a smile.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nice inside. Pretty good Phoenix money goes far. Everything looks very model home made up. Maybe a little static.

No one is around as Weston enters. He takes a chicken leg from the refrigerator.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

NATALIE WESTON, 39, works at a computer, hair in a sloppy bun, pencil between her teeth. Weston pokes his head inside.

WESTON

Hey, hon.

NATALIE

Daisy was out past curfew.

WESTON

All right, I'll go beat her.

NATALIE

Second time this week. She just doesn't care about punishment.

He walks in, still gnawing at the chicken leg.

WESTON

Well, maybe we should actually enforce the punishment from now on so she fears it.

NATALIE

I'd rather she just obeyed.

Weston nods, sure, as he chews. She turns to him finally.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Did you look at the school brochures?

WESTON

Yeah, but, the price is what it is. Private school fees are the same as what Harvard cost when we were in high school. It's fucking nuts.

NATALIE

We have to put her in one.

WESTON

We're stretched out right now. Too many vacations and... fancy shoes. Besides public schools are fine --

NATALIE

-- Wes, stop. They're shit. The only one worth a fuck is in the Gable district, and unless we move...

WESTON

...Would you please? You know that stupid real estate investment set us back. I'm working on it though. We had... did you see the show tonight?

She shakes 'no.'

WESTON (CONT'D)

We had Wyatt on and I got him to talk publicly about redistricting the school zones--

Finished with the chicken, he sets the bone on the bureau.

NATALIE

Uh-uh.

Weston withdraws it and is forced to just hold it.

WESTON

--So it's out there. Part of the public promise. He gets reelected he has to change it. Problem solved.

NATALIE

It's four months before elections. That means next school year.

WESTON

So? We can keep what's-his-face's sperm dick away from her for another semester. It'll be fine.

She sighs hard, not sold.

NATALIE

It won't be fine. We need to move.

She turns back to the computer. Weston stands there with his chicken bone, no purpose anymore.

WESTON

Supposed to talk to Grevel tomorrow about LA.

NATALIE

Okay.

WESTON

...this is Rock Solid...

Doesn't hook her. He shuffles out.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - DAISY'S ROOM - LATER

Aside from a slightly darker smartass vibe, like any other teenage girl's room. Daisy ipads away as the door knocks.

WESTON

Hey.

He peeks inside. She looks up.

DAISY

Hey.

WESTON

How ya doing?

DAISY

Ukraine internet mail order brides make solid money. You should hear these testimonials. What do you think a nice Arizona girl fetches?

WESTON

Why are you reading that junk?

She turns the ipad around. It's the Local Profile segment of his newscast. She gestures to Wyatt.

DAISY

This guy is a total knob.

It brightens him up. He comes in closer to her.

WESTON

Yeah, he's a jackass. Wanted to return a car. Big pain in the ass. Normally I'd never do it, but I let him because... favors.

DAISY

You can see Susan get pissed when the camera moves to you at the beginning.

She rewinds to the start of the segment.

ON THE IPAD the newscast rolls and the camera tightens from a wide shot of both of them to a single of Weston.

WESTON (ON IPAD)

Tonight on a new chapter of my Local Profile series...

She points to Susan as the camera racks focus. Just as Weston speaks his first words Susan makes a 'fuck him' eye roll as she's pushed out of frame.

Daisy laughs, plays it again. Weston snark smiles, watching.

DAISY

Look at her face. She hates it.

WESTON

...Ahhhh, look at that. What a...
bitch. She couldn't stand it when I
got my own profile segment.

DAISY

That's what you get when you suck,
Sanchez. You can't match the
Weston.

Weston eats the attention up, but knows he's being played.

WESTON

Two nights this week?

DAISY

I was late by, like, ten minutes.

WESTON

Ten minutes in mom time is like two
hours. You know that.

DAISY

Smooth it over for me.

He kisses her on the head as he gets up.

WESTON

Okay, Slick, just don't make it so
hard for me.

She smiles big as he heads out.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

The house is asleep but Weston is still up. He checks email.

He opens one from SCRIBNER PUBLISHING, reading it like it's
telling him he has cancer.

"COLIN, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? ANXIOUSLY AWAITING FIRST DRAFT
OF YOUR MANUSCRIPT *HARD NEWS*. UNFORTUNATELY, WE CAN'T FORWARD
YOU ANOTHER ADVANCE. OF COURSE, I HAVE TO POINT OUT IT'S
ALREADY PAST DUE. BOSSES ARE ASKING FOR AN ETA."

Weston just sighs. Exits out of the email.

EXT. WESTON/MARKS TOYOTA MILE OF CARS – MORNING

The outline of Weston's face looms large above a lot of new and used cars. A handful of people mill around.

A Prius pulls into the lot and Weston steps out.

INT. WESTON/MARKS TOYOTA MILE OF CARS – OFFICE – MORNING

Blinds plink open and a man stares out at Weston. Big JIM MARKS, 56, might as well wear a cowboy hat, watches Weston motion over one of the mechanics from the garage. He points to the scrapes at the bottom of the door.

Marks furrows his brow. Been doing it for a while now.

INT. WESTON/MARKS TOYOTA MILE OF CARS – SHOWROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Marks meets Weston as he comes inside the car-packed main floor. Weston knows it's coming.

WESTON

I know...

MARKS

We're at a critical mass.

WESTON

We're a little down, we'll figure it out.

A couple in the shop spot him. The WIFE points him out to her HUSBAND. Weston charms a smile to her.

MARKS

Auditor went over the books, Wes. We're too far in the red. I had to take out another loan.

WESTON

Well, good. That gives us time.

MARKS

Not really.

The couple wanders over. Weston brings up the 10,000 watt smile as the Wife shyly takes out her phone.

WIFE

Mr. Weston, could I bother you for
a picture?

WESTON

Of course. Looking at cars today?

WIFE

Maybe. Your hair looks so nice on
TV.

MARKS

It wasn't a bank, they won't extend
us anymore. Private investors.

Weston poses with her, the bored husband takes the shot.

WESTON

Okay. A reasonable stake?

(to the couple)

More than just Toyotas. We got
beamers, Infinitis, Lexus. Buy
something nice for yourself.

He smiles at them. The Wife is charmed. He forces a handshake
out of the uninterested Husband.

WESTON (CONT'D)

You want a picture too?

HUSBAND

The handshake was the thrill of my
life.

Weston smiles it away as they head off. He turns back to
Marks, on schmooze duty.

MARKS

The stake's actually quite
reasonable.

WESTON

Fine then.

Flashes the smile for him too.

INT. WESTON/MARKS TOYOTA MILE OF CARS - OFFICE - MOMENTS
LATER

The requisite golf photos and paraphernalia adorn the office. Weston looks at a photo on the wall of him smiling and "presenting" the lot of cars, ta-da style. "HE GIVES YOU THE NEWS, NOW LET HIM GIVE YOU A RIDE!"

WESTON

Should have worn a blazer for that.

MARKS

You know the Sand Vipers?

WESTON

Is that the state animal?

MARKS

No, it's a motorcycle club. Like
bikers.

WESTON

Okay?

MARKS

They're the investors.

It takes a second for that to set in.

WESTON

What?

MARKS

The stake *is* reasonable. The time
frame they expect it back is not.

WESTON

What?

MARKS

These guys are serious people. I
mean... they're serious.

WESTON

Are you fucking... kidding me!?

Marks gestures 'no'. Weston starts to wander in a stupor.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Why the fuck... How the fuck... How
the fuck are outlaw bikers
investing in a car dealership?

MARKS

My nephew Dave knows one of them.
These guys are 21st century now.
The Hell's Angels have a website,
for Christ's sake. Dave didn't tell
them it was a car dealership... he
maybe said it was a... a Harley
shop... to get their interest. They
want to legitimize their money...

WESTON

--Their outlaw drug/murder money.
(off Marks's hesitant nod)
And you put that into our
company... that has my name on it?

Weston is nearly apoplectic.

MARKS

I went to six banks. They all said no.
Investors, nothing. We're underwater.
And on the hook for bum inventory. If
you got some big deal cooking...

WESTON

I'm working on it. Probably leaving
this weekend for LA.

MARKS

Not tomorrow you're not.
(off Weston's uncertainty)
The promo event. I got venders
coming. Your ass is gonna be there
to smile and sign autographs.

WESTON

I have to look at schools with Nat.

MARKS

You talked me into an expansion with
this local celebrity crap. I even
put your face on the trunks, but so
far I haven't seen shit. I used your
name trying to drum up a legit
loan... fucking crickets. I mean,
I'm in this up to my eyeballs.

WESTON

So am I.

MARKS

Well, when the Sand Vipers come
looking for someone to collect
from, maybe they can't read the
documents, but they can probably
understand pictures.

He gestures outside to Weston's stenciled smiling face in the logo. There's a knock on the door and a MECHANIC peeks in.

MECHANIC

Those scrapes on the Prius are too
deep. We have to replace the door.
Can't sell it as new anymore.

Weston's eyes quietly glaze over.

INT. NEWS OFFICES - HALLWAY - DAY

Weston strides the office. Sanchez almost bumps into him. A slightly wry look between them as they keep walking side by side. Silent for a beat. Finally:

SUSAN SANCHEZ
You're off your nut, Wes.

WESTON
I'm sitting squarely on top of my nut, thank you.

SUSAN SANCHEZ
They can fire you.

WESTON
They can. They won't. Not with those Local Profiles so popular.

He makes a slight look to her before heading in another direction. She watches for a beat. Buried envy.

INT. WESTON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Weston walks inside. Davis is already sitting there. Weston doesn't break stride or demeanor.

WESTON
Davis, my little gummy worm. What brings you here on so blah blah a whatever.

DAVIS
Yeah, I wonder Wes. You slip out yesterday after broadcast because of the punch or the contract?

WESTON
Give me one good reason why it couldn't be both.

DAVIS
Hefner came to see me. Want to know what he said?

WESTON
The Pulitzer committee is finally considering muscle tone a factor.

He gives a good triceps flex.

DAVIS
Wes, god damn it!

Weston relents the sarcasm and sits. The school brochures are still there to taunt him.

WESTON
Yeah, that sounds more like him.

DAVIS
Is it the whiskey withdraw? Or are you just losing it?

WESTON
Careful...

DAVIS
I swear to God, you better not drag me down too.

WESTON
Drag you down? The numbers are stellar. I'm your prized pony. The face of Phoenix! You get to look good because I look awesome.

DAVIS
Is that why you're going to LA?

Weston plays it in stride, Davis clearly wasn't supposed to know.

WESTON
I had the vacation coming up. What I do with my time--

DAVIS
--you'll be in breach. Hefner said if you think the outrageous contract demands will give you an out, think again.

Tough stance. Weston holds the line.

WESTON
Do you go to the gym, Davis?
Starting to show.

Davis holds his look a beat and then heads for the door.

DAVIS
You're on six o'clock tonight.

WESTON

What!?

DAVIS

Rick has the flu. You're pulling
six and eleven.

Barely a linger and he heads out. Weston chews on it, gets up. So angry he starts rocking against the desk.

WESTON

...son of a bitch. Scum-sucking six
o'clock loser fuckfaces.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Weston's desk rocking turns into his frustration fucking Mona against the kitchen counter. She clearly just got home. Bags of groceries are on the ground.

As she moans he sees wine bottle on the counter. It's been opened, but is corked. Residue on the side. He arches and leans in as he thrusts. Positioning gets awkward, but he gets his nose close to the top of the bottle. A sniff... so good.

And then he slips and falls. Awkward as hell, tangled up in his pants. Mona yelps and turns. Hard not to laugh seeing him in such a brutally open and helpless state.

MONA

Are you okay...?

WESTON

-- Don't acknowledge me now. Turn.
Turn back. This has not happened...

She chuckles and turns around as he scrambles for dignity. As he does he gets a clear view into one of the grocery bags. A pregnancy test. He goes, well, limp, at the sight of it.

He gets up, uncertain whether to pull his pants all the way up. Mona hikes up her skirt, ass popping out just so as she rounds the corner. Weston watches. Paranoia versus lust. He doesn't buckle up and follows her.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

The bed shakes and rattles as Weston and Mona have rigorous sex. Mona is in oblivion, but Weston is still preoccupied.

MONA

...Baby...

Simple word, oddly timed. Weston cocks an eye though.

MONA (CONT'D)
...baby... baby, baby...

Really throwing him now. He keeps moving though...

MONA (CONT'D)
...baby, baby, baby, baby, baby...

In a flash he bounds off her and backs away, hands up.

WESTON
What's with the baby shit?

Startled out of it, Mona turns to him, uncertain.

MONA
What?

WESTON
What the hell was that? It was like
a fertility mantra or something.

MONA
What are you talking about?

WESTON
What you were saying.

MONA
What was I saying? I don't know.

WESTON
I was just, I, I, I... I don't, I
can't... And I have to do the six
o'clock fuckface hour.

MONA
(no earthly idea)
What?

Weston paces, agitation coming out.

WESTON
Do you know what schools cost when
babies grow up?

MONA
Okay, let's calm down now.

Weston's phone rings. He does an 'oh shit' when he sees the ID. He flutters out of the room leaving a baffled Mona.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A naked Weston wanders into the bright room. He takes a couple calming breaths and answers.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Hey, Grev, buddy, what's happening?

INT. TALENT AGENCY - CONTINUOUS

Slick LA offices way up on the go fuck yourself floor. Smoggy LA out the window. GREVEL PIERSON, 40, rolls calls.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
Wes, how's the heartland?

INTERCUT WITH WESTON IN MONA'S APARTMENT

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Farther east.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
Everything east of Vegas and west of the Holland Tunnel is the heartland.
Shit, that's good. I got to write that down and give it as a script note to a writer on something.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
So, what's the news?

But Grevel actually is writing it down. Weston is forced to wait what feels like forever. He strolls naked.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
...Yeah, so, it looks like probably.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
What does probably mean?

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
It means it's you or one other guy.
But they're still doing it Monday,
so we'll know tomorrow.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Jesus, what do I have to do?

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
I told you. You need to shake things up. Big shit in Phoenix is still just who gives a shit.
(MORE)

GREVEL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
We need national attention. Get
viral somehow. Be interesting.
Exciting.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
...I punched a councilman.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
Yeah, okay, slugger. Look, it's
close. I think you're going to get
it. Just hang tight, but be
thinking about grabbing attention.
Dangerous. But safe.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
...Okay. Okay. Because I'm *ready to*
rollll--

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
--Don't. Don't. You don't have to
do that for me.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
(sheepish, embarrassed)
Right, okay.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
I'll talk to you later, buddy.

He hangs up. Weston chews on it, sees Mona standing there.

WESTON
I have to be dangerous,
interesting, and exciting.

MONA
We all do.

WESTON
Yeah, but for pay.

Off Weston, considering it --

INT. NEWS STUDIO - NIGHT

Weston sits with six o'clock co-anchor SHEILA ABBOT, who
finishes rattling off a story. Weston glances up to the
control booth. Davis is up there, lording over him.

SHEILA ABBOT
...For more on this story we go to
Nathan Frank in the field. Nathan?

EXT. STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

NATHAN FRANK, 35, has an on-the-steps interview going with Attorney General HARVEY PLATT, 55.

NATHAN WEST

I'm here with state attorney general Harvey Platt. Do you see a reversal of Proposition 42 anytime this session?

PLATT

Well, if we can get the state legislature to open a dialogue...

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Operating his phone under the anchor desk, Weston scrolls through emails. A new one from SCRIBNER PUBLISHING. The Subject line reads "MANUSCRIPT?" He passes it. Another from GREVEL. He opens it. It just reads "BE CRAZY!"

Weston quietly sighs. Just then a new one comes in from MONA. He opens it. It's a scandalous bent over nudie shot. He quickly exits it out and shoots an eye to co-anchor Sheila, who's eyeballing him. He puts it away.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Davis watches, in control, enjoying making Weston eat crow.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Weston tap taps his fingers, chewing on some idea. He zones back in to the interview.

ON THE MONITOR Platt drones on.

PLATT (ON THE MONITOR)
...I think we can make it happen.

WESTON

--Excuse me, Mr. Attorney General?

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Davis's neck hairs spike up.

EXT. STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Both Platt and Nathan's rhythm is thrown, not expecting talkback from the studio.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Sheila is totally unprepared for being thrown back to camera. She's caught picking her teeth.

WESTON

This is Colin Weston back in the studio. Did you just say you think the bill can be reversed?

ON THE MONITOR Platt hears him over the feed.

PLATT (ON THE MONITOR)

Uh, yes. Hi Colin.

WESTON

Well, that's quite a reversal from what you said earlier this year.

PLATT (ON THE MONITOR)

Things have changed.

WESTON

No, they haven't.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Polly has sidled up to Davis.

POLLY

Is he supposed to be doing that?

Davis just hawkeyes the monitor.

EXT. STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Nathan awkwardly holds the microphone for Platt.

PLATT

Well, they have changed. The entire legislative docket is different--

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Weston rolls right over him, suddenly profoundly put off.

WESTON

--No, no, no. Don't try to reverse your position now, Mr. Platt. These anodyne statements you're making are trying to conceal the truth--

PLATT (ON THE MONITOR)

--Anodyne? I'm just saying--

WESTON

You're doing it. Right now on live TV. You reprehensible scoundrel.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Davis goes to high anxiety.

DAVIS

Motherfuck.

EXT. STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Platt is taken aback. Nathan tries to intercede.

NATHAN FRANK

I think what the Attorney Gen--

PLATT

--This is extremely rude of you--

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

WESTON (ON TV)

Rude?! How do you have the nerve? You're blatantly lying. I got to tell you, I'm getting very tired of politicians constantly reversing positions when the tides change.

PLATT (ON THE MONITOR)

I'm not reversing anything. You're being belligerent.

WESTON

No, no, no. You do not get to insult *me*. You say that to *me* again and I challenge you to a DUEL!

Platt looks flabbergasted.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Davis, Polly and the room go silent, mouths open.

EXT. STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

A gawk of silence then Platt just shakes his head and leaves.

PLATT

Okay, I'm done.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Satisfied, Weston grins as a stunned Sheila picks it back up.

SHEILA ABBOT

Okay... Nathan Frank at the capitol.
When we come back we'll meet a local
labrador who became a prize winning
race dog all while missing one of
her back paws. Heartwarming story.

The music plays and Sheila shuffles papers. Someone offscreen
shouts an "All Clear!" Sheila turns to Weston.

SHEILA ABBOT (CONT'D)

The fuck?

He rap taps the desk.

WESTON

Ratings spike at 11pm, believe it.
Six o'clock can suck it.

INT. WESTON'S OFFICE - LATER

Davis paces his fury away while Weston sits at his desk going
over news copy, scratching notes. The occasional scoff.

DAVIS

Punch a councilman, challenge the
attorney general to a duel, maybe
sodomize the governor next.

WESTON

The punch was off air.

DAVIS

Oh, well then why do it? If it's
all for press and ratings...

WESTON

Davis, would you go away. I'm no longer fond of people.

DAVIS

God, I wish there was accountability in life.

WESTON

Keep dreaming.

(holds up show copy)

Our copy editor Skip...

DAVIS

Ted.

WESTON

He went to community college, didn't he?

Davis picks up one of Weston's Local News Award plaques.

WESTON (CONT'D)

You know how I can tell?

(re: the copy)

This eleven o'clock copy... was written by a retarded person.

DAVIS

Wes... let me explain something to you...

WESTON

Yes, yes. In one sentence I've managed to offend both retard and community colleges graduates.

(suddenly laughs)

That sounds funny, doesn't it?

'Community college graduate'? It's like, cash register specialist.

DAVIS

You know, one day the public you pretend to like is going to find out what you really think of them.

Weston raises an "a-ha" finger.

WESTON

At which point I'll publicly *not* apologize. You know why?

Davis looks at him, enlighten me.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Because nobody likes a sissy. Not even the retard or cash register specialists.

He tosses the copy on his desk and leaves Davis as he exits.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Enjoy your most-tweeted about 6pm broadcast ever. See you at 10:59.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Weston works a laptop with Daisy while Natalie cooks dinner.

WESTON

So it's up on Youtube now?

DAISY

And Vine. It just needs traffic.

ON THE COMPUTER they look at video of the newscast.

WESTON (ON THE COMPUTER)

...You say that to me again and I challenge you to a DUEL!

DAISY

Awesome.

NATALIE

Not awesome. Wes, tell her.

He plugs a fob into the computer.

WESTON

Right, not awesome. Now do this one.

DAISY

What's this?

WESTON

Some raw feed from the other night after the broadcast ended.

She plays the clip. Weston decks Wyatt and lords over him.

WESTON (ON THE COMPUTER) (CONT'D)

You're such a lying sack of shit, Greg. I did you a fucking favor...

DAISY

Holy shit!

Natalie moves in, watching in shock.

NATALIE
What the hell was that?

DAISY
You full on punched that guy in the face, dad!

WESTON
Yeah, but not hard. I think it'll play as righteously maverick. Do you download it to the same place?

NATALIE
Wes! Stop!

He turns, sees her face in total dismay. Weston sours. What? She nods to Daisy who's gawping at her father punching a guy.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

Weston and Natalie get into it.

WESTON
I was calling out lying politicians. That's a good thing. It's noble.

NATALIE
Would you stop selling? Do I look like an idiot game show contestant?

Like a low blow. It makes him simmer.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
What are you doing all this for?

WESTON
Are you kidding? Do you not realize what we're up against every day? What it takes to keep it up? And we're not even that extravagant. But it goes into this giant maw, becomes a cycle. And now it's me or another guy. And I got to be sexy and crazy and viral, or, you know, Daise is pregnant by prom and the Sand Vipers repossess our house.

NATALIE
What?

His phone chimes. He looks, another email from SCRIBNER PUBLISHING. The subject line reads "NEED MANUSCRIPT NOW".

WESTON

Fuck you!

(to Natalie)

Not you. Look, I'll smooth it over with her. Tell her punching people is bad. I have to go back to the station for the power hour.

He heads out leaving an annoyed Natalie standing there.

INT. WESTON'S MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

Weston drives, on the phone, trying to finesse his way out.

WESTON

...it's just a little delay. It's actually a good thing, because I'm in the middle of upping my profile in a big way, so there's even more material for the book.

RICKARD (FROM SPEAKER)

I still need pages. I need a draft of Hard News yesterday. The book is supposed to be ready for fall.

WESTON

I hear you, and I'm saying you're going to be getting it imminently.

A HARLEY DUDE on a bike speeds up next to him. Wearing a leather cut. Small chill goes through Weston.

RICKARD (FROM SPEAKER)

When's imminent?

WESTON

It's as imminent as imminent gets...

A glance to Harley Dude. He gets a quick look back. Weston tries to shrink in his seat. He slows a bit.

RICKARD (FROM SPEAKER)

Because the president of the company is asking.

The car in front of Harley Dude slows forcing him to slow and even back up with Weston.

WESTON

...Okay. Look, I'm going... I'm probably going to LA this weekend for this big, big deal...

Traffic then halts completely. They're side by side.

RICKARD (FROM SPEAKER)

Great, we have an office out there.

Harley Dude turns and looks directly at Weston, who's caught staring and can't help himself from smiling big to a potential fan. Harley Dude keeps looking, stone cold.

WESTON

...Yeah, okay, so...

(remembers)

Oh, about that additional advance--

RICKARD (FROM SPEAKER)

--No.

Harley Dude faces forward and roars off with the traffic.

WESTON

...Okay. Talk soon.

He hangs up and breathes a small sigh.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - NIGHT

Weston walks the hall, when suddenly Susan Sanchez appears and pushes him into a small supply closet.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - SUPPLY CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Susan is on him like a tick.

SUSAN SANCHEZ

Don't fuck with me. Are you putting a national reel together? For cable or network? Are you being scouted?

WESTON

I don't know, maybe.

She points a daunting finger in his face and gesticulates it for a beat as she considers.

SUSAN SANCHEZ

Why else would you be acting so bug-o? You start drinking again?

WESTON
(calmly)
Susan... Your forehead is shiny on
camera. And you mumble your "R's".

He moves past her. Can't help it. She rubs at her forehead.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - LATER

Commercial break mid-broadcast, but Davis is on high alert,
laserbeaming Weston through the glass. Polly is nearby.

POLLY
Good so far. He's behaving.

Davis watches Weston shuffle paper. The too-calm tension gets
to him and he abruptly grabs a headset.

DAVIS (INTO HEADSET)
I know you're fucking with me, Wes.
Are you trying to get fired? Some
contract negotiating tactic? You
know we'll litigate if you take
another job. Non-compete limbo for
two years? Full time car salesman,
that's you.

Weston doesn't waver. Doesn't even look up. Polly and the
others in the room try not to look at the uncouth Davis.

Then:

WESTON
FUUUUUUUCK. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck,
fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck...

He stays perfectly poised. Everyone is thrown, then one of
the ENGINEERS looks back to Davis.

ENGINEER
Back from commercial in five...

Graphics are up, what should he do?

INT. NEWS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Weston keeps on, perfectly poised. Susan is utterly baffled.

WESTON
Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck...

INTERCUT WITH THE CONTROL BOOTH

They all look worried.

ENGINEER
...four, three...

WESTON
Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuck...

He looks up, makes a mock 'Even I can't stop it' gesture.

ENGINEER
...two...

DAVIS
Jesus, mute! MUTE HIM!

One of the Engineers slaps a MUTE button.

On the floor the Sound Guy points and cues "One" and Weston abruptly stops "fuck"-ing and goes back to copy on a dime.

WESTON
--Now we take you to a story...

The Engineers scramble as no audio comes out over the feed.

DAVIS
Shit! Unmute, unmute! Audio!

They hit the button and audio pipes back in the feed.

WESTON
...about the homeless shelters in
downtown Phoenix. Susan?

He turns to her. She's still fluttered. Tries to begin:

SUSAN SANCHEZ
Rorr--

Horrible mumbled "R". She restarts, enunciates huge.

SUSAN SANCHEZ (CONT'D)
Rory Kinkaid has been looking at
several local shelters...

Weston bites his smile.

EXT. WESTON'S HOUSE - BACK PATIO - NIGHT

Weston sits alone in the quiet night, a laptop open. He looks at bank statements. Lots of withdraws and payments. He sighs heavy before exiting the screen. The weight of it is obvious.

He looks at a file named 'HARD NEWS'. The cursor hovers over it a beat, but he feels beaten before he even opens it and just closes the computer.

He drinks from a Diet Coke can, but it's empty. He swishes it, looking at it, almost willing it to be something else. He finally sets it down and grabs his car keys.

He heads to a gate that leads to the driveway when Daisy comes in from the same gate. Busted, she tries to play cool.

DAISY

Hey, where are you going?

WESTON

I'm going out--

DAISY

--Do you think mom's going to push this private school thing?

WESTON

Are we really trying to pretend I didn't just bust you sneaking back in?

DAISY

Dad, come on. I just went a few blocks over for, like, a half hour.

WESTON

Where, to Johnny Mr. Boner's house? Come on, Daise. You're killing me with this.

DAISY

Nothing happened. I'm not stupid.

WESTON

You *think* you're not stupid. But you're young, so by definition you are. Most *adults* are stupid. People actually get stupider the older they get.

DAISY

So I'm the smartest one here?

WESTON

I said most adults, wise ass.

He recalibrates with a fatherly judgement sigh.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Do you understand your mother and I aren't trying to oppress you? That we're doing our best to ensure the evil sticky icky world out there full of its stupid people keeps its claws off you for as long as possible?

DAISY

I know that.

WESTON

Because as smart as you *may* be, the world isn't what you think it is. I promise you the reality of it will surprise you one day.

It comes from a deep place within, and she can tell. She's actually appreciative of the conversation. She nods 'okay'.

DAISY

Mom...

Waiting for the judgement. He sighs, hugs her, kisses her on the top of her head.

WESTON

Get back in before she notices.
I'll be back in a bit.

He nods her off. She smiles and heads back inside. He watches her a beat then heads out through the gate.

EXT. CIVIC CENTER ADJUNCT BUILDING - NIGHT

Weston paces up to a dumpy building. A few people loiter outside, smoking. There's a sign on the door. "AL ANON". Weston stops, looks at the people. They all look strung out and miserable. Finally he backs away and turns around.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Weston is at the register.

WESTON

Give me a bottle of the Blue Label.

CLERK

The good stuff, huh?

Weston merely glares. The Clerk reaches behind the counter.

CLERK (CONT'D)
\$192.28

Weston forks over the bills, feeling the worth of every dollar.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Weston walks down a path, only a few are out this late. City streets are still nearby. He spots a billboard overlooking the park. KPTV Action News. His smiling face beams out.

He spies a HOMELESS MAN on a bench and he sits down next to him, barely a look, just continuing to gaze up at his own face. The Homeless Man stares at him, uncertain, not used to people approaching him. Still looking at his sign:

WESTON
You a drunk?

The Homeless Man stares. Who is this patrician gentleman?

HOMELESS MAN
Yeah.

WESTON
I miss the ease of it. The problem with all those meetings is they try and tell you there's no solace in the bottle when they all know full well there is. It might be an illusion but it works out to the same thing.

HOMELESS MAN
So don't go.

WESTON
Yeah. I don't think I will.

He finally turns to the Homeless Man and matches his stare. He hands him the bottle. The Homeless Man wearily takes it.

Weston watches as he twists the cap. The perforations snap like music as he opens it. He slugs it back, a whiskey bead hanging from his lip as he finishes. He offers it back.

Weston stares at him, his dirt and scrapes. The torn clothes and food scraps by his side. The bottle hangs in the air.

WESTON (CONT'D)
The problem is I'm smart enough to recognize the illusions that matter.

He gestures up to the billboard, his perfect face. The Homeless Man squints at it.

WESTON (CONT'D)
That one I believe in.
(re: the bottle)
That one just tricked me.
(then)
Shit's chasing me, Fred. Feel like
I'm getting swallowed up. A hell of
my own making, sure. You can have
so much, but somehow it's never
enough. One wrong left turn, and
suddenly you're in fucking Zimbabwe
or something. How did that happen?
(beat)
If she's pregnant I swear to God...
(big sigh)
At least I smell better than you.

He gets up and walks off, leaving his pricey whiskey behind.

HOMELESS MAN
My name's not Fred.

WESTON
Who cares?

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

Morning sunlight shines into the spacious bathroom. Weston is at the sink, hair askew, just getting the sleep out. He yawn/stretches his mouth, making noises as if he's getting camera ready. Then he smiles. Smiles big. Smiles bigger. He tries a couple quiet variations of 'Hello'.

A mock newscaster voice:

NATALIE
Shocking news as a fire rampaged
through a local school.

Busted. She peeks in, slyly. He glances at her 'yeah, yeah'.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
The local Mounties were unable to get
there in time to prevent tragedy.

WESTON
You used 'local' twice. Bad copy.

NATALIE
...All the kids burned to death...

WESTON

...And Mounties is wrong for
several reasons.

She comes up beside him, a puckish grin.

NATALIE

The community is beside themselves.

WESTON

Itself.

NATALIE

...Mass suicides are expected.

WESTON

Hoped for.

She wraps an arm around him, looking at their reflection. For her, the simple ease of morning. The day's more loaded for him.

NATALIE

You sure you can't come today?

WESTON

I got the stupid car thing. You
guys can come by after you're done.

NATALIE

How much luck do you think I'll
have convincing her of that?

He nods 'right'. Her puckish grin turns into something else as her hand roves across his chest.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

You okay? You seem like you've been
stressed. It's not like you.

WESTON

What is 'like me'? I forget
sometimes. Keeping all the plates
spinning... the first thing to go
is my actual perspective.

The hint of genuine vulnerability peeks out. She wavers a beat on how big a statement this is.

NATALIE

Come on, you don't mean that.
You're a jungle tiger.

She scoots right past it, opting for positive reinforcement. Weston grins it away, goes safely back to coy.

WESTON
...do the newscaster voice again.

She grins, happy he's playing.

NATALIE
Gunfire today at the state capitol...

WESTON
Oh, baby...

Pretend hot. She laughs and they slip back into easy mode.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Onions get diced as Weston prepares an omelet. Natalie has the school brochures out trying to force-excite Daisy.

NATALIE
They have an Olympic size pool.

DAISY
Mom, I never learned how to swim.

NATALIE
Weird they gave you those competition medals then.

Weston checks his cell phone. "NO MISSED CALLS". He grimaces.

A TV is on a local morning talk show. Plastic co-hosts go back and forth over inane blather.

PLASTIC MALE HOST (ON TV)
...there is no accountability in media these days.

PLASTIC FEMALE HOST (ON TV)
Well, at least we got some colorful local figures like Colin Weston.

Weston does a sort of sing-song head nod to that.

PLASTIC MALE HOST (ON TV)
I know! Wow, if there was ever a better display of a public meltdown...

Natalie and Daisy turn their heads to it, then to Weston. He calmly shakes his head, 'no worry.'

PLASTIC FEMALE HOST (ON TV)
He's just bucking for attention.

PLASTIC MALE HOST (ON TV)
He's bucking for a sedative. He's
an embarrassment to the profession.
The network *has* to be taking steps.

Natalie gets up and turns it off. A mostly sweet look to him.

NATALIE
You brought it on yourself.

He smiles pleasantly and she kisses him. Daisy gets up too.

DAISY
Dad, why aren't you coming to this
forced relocation program with us?

WESTON
I have to go make money so we can
be safe and free.

NATALIE
Looks good. Save the leftovers.
(to Daisy)
Come on, you poor put-upon child.

She makes a whip lashing sound and they shuffle out. After a beat of being alone Weston turns the television back on.

PLASTIC MALE HOST (ON TV)
You ask me he should be thrown out.
There's a Youtube clip going around
of him punching a city Councilman.

Weston makes a small 'yes!' gesture.

PLASTIC MALE HOST (ON TV) (CONT'D)
All I'm saying is there's nothing
more pathetic than a punch drunk
boxer that doesn't know he's passed
his sell-by date.

Weston starts to get a grin.

INT. MORNING TALK SHOW STUDIO - MORNING

The show is still in progress. Grips, producers, and line people all make the show happen.

A side door opens and Weston walks inside, a determined confidence to his gait. A Grip does a doubletake when he recognizes him. Weston heads right for the live set.

GRIP
Hey, you can't--

No use. Weston walks right into the live shot. The Plastic Hosts and their guest, a WOMAN making arts and crafts ducks made out of socks, can't hide their shock.

INT. MORNING TALK SHOW STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS
All the techs and producers are stunned motionless.

PRODUCER
What. The. Hell.

INT. MORNING TALK SHOW STUDIO - CONTINUOUS
Weston looms over the Plastic Hosts.

WESTON
All right then. Tough guys. So what
was that again?

The Plastic Male Host is the first to recover speech.

PLASTIC MALE HOST
Colin Weston, ladies and gentleman.
We don't usually get walk ins from
competing channels much... ever.

A slight beat as he simply stares.

PLASTIC MALE HOST (CONT'D)
You didn't bring your dueling
pistols, did you, Colin?

WESTON
I use swords.

Both Plastics look for any kind of direction from offstage.

INT. MORNING TALK SHOW STUDIO - CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS
The room watches, rapt.

PROGRAMMER
Do you want to cut away?

PRODUCER
Are you kidding?

INT. MORNING TALK SHOW STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Both Plastic Hosts wait for some kind of tell from Weston.

PLASTIC FEMALE HOST

That's a pretty good stare down,
but was there something you wanted?

WESTON

I'd like you to have a sudden,
violent on-air bowel movement but I
just don't expect it.

A Cameraman chuckles. THROUGH HIS LENS the shot is framed.

PLASTIC MALE HOST

Uh... wow Colin. We've had a lot of
guests wish we'd do a lot of
things. Never that.

WESTON

Sure they have. They just haven't
said it to your face.

PLASTIC MALE HOST

Did you want to sit down and
discuss... media?

WESTON

With you two? She's a clown and
you're a fraud.

PLASTIC MALE HOST

I'm a fraud, am I?

Tries to toughen his stance, but Weston glares hard.

WESTON

You're not for real. Vitriol is all
you have to offer because you know
you can't outthink a professional.
Sound bites and headlines because
you lack depth of insight.

(re: Guest with crafts)

Duck ladies because it's the extent
of your IQ. You make a point to sit
next to bald men so no one notices
your thinning hairline. You think
that makes you crafty, it makes you a
subspecies. You impress your own
shortcomings on viewers thinking
their embrace validates you, but it
just shows you're reaching for the
low-hanging fruit.

(MORE)

WESTON (CONT'D)

But I'm an embarrassment? I'm not the one taking remedial math my senior year. But if being the valedictorian of summer school is the only plaque you're ever going to get, I suppose you have to hang it on the wall, right?

The Plastic Male Host smugly grins, tired of it now.

WESTON (CONT'D)

You're the one that brings the media down to its knees, and you do it because on your knees is the one place you know you really get to shine.

He turns to leave a dead silent studio.

EXT. WESTON/MARKS TOYOTA MILE OF CARS - DAY

THROUGH A CAMERA LENS an ELEPHANT rears its trunk and bellows. Weston sits atop the animal with a giant smile. He wears a hat with his own face on it.

WESTON

Hellooooo, Phoenix! Yeah!

Full promotional blitz on the car lot. Popcorn machines, balloons, clowns, some sad horses, and that even sadder elephant. A WOMAN is strapped on behind Weston as he waves at the medium-sized crowd. "YEAR'S BEST PRICES!" banners are up.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Great deals today at Weston/Marks Toyota. Zero down financing. Come on down and take a ride!

The Cameraman wraps and the elephant is lead to its Trainer who summons it to kneel. The Woman passenger is guided off. Marks comes up beside it.

MARKS

Volume isn't up as much as we need.
You have to keep going a bit longer.
Got a good TV spot at least.

WESTON

I'm going to march this elephant to your car and have it shit in the sunroof, you know that, right?

He smiles as another WOMAN comes up with a pen and paper. He reaches down and signs then poses as the Woman leans up against the elephant and her bored HUSBAND takes the pic.

MARKS

Any more passengers?

MONA (O.S.)

Sure, I'll take a ride.

Mona emerges through the crowd. Weston winces as a smiling Marks helps her up on the elephant.

MARKS

Step right up, little lady. Take a ride with Phoenix's own Colin Weston, then take a ride --

WESTON

--Yeah, yeah. She's got it.

They get up and the elephant starts its lazy route.

MONA

Oooh, so exotic.

WESTON

It's basically like the Serengeti right now. You can tell people you've been to Africa and it's more or less true.

She wraps an arm around him, seemingly for safety. They keep eyes forward.

WESTON (CONT'D)

My wife and daughter might come here.

MONA

I'm just a fan of local newsmen and a potential car buyer riding an elephant.

WESTON

I hate my life. Sometimes.

MONA

So not all the time.

WESTON

No. The other times I love the idea of my life.

They cruise the lot at low speed.

MONA

So you saw that pregnancy test in
the grocery bag.

WESTON

Yeah.

MONA

And I took it.

WESTON

Yeah.

MONA

And I'm pregnant

WESTON

...Yeah.

He keeps a smile out to the grazing people despite the epic
lightening going on behind his eyes. Mona plays it cool.

At the side of the lot BIKERS ride in. A dozen Sand Vipers.
They circle around and line up towards the edge of the event.

Everyone looks. The Sand Vipers don't do anything, just hang
out. But the leather and chains send out an eerie vibe. Marks
looks uncertain what to do. It even momentarily diverts Mona.

MONA

What's that about?

Before he can catalogue it into his head Weston's phone
rings. His future is on the line. He stares at it a beat,
then finally answers.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

Yeah?

GREVEL (FROM PHONE)

You got it, buddy! You're it!

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

...Okay...

Tries like hell to keep it level, doesn't want to tip Mona.

GREVEL (FROM PHONE)

They liked your reel best.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

They saw the Youtube clips?

GREVEL (FROM PHONE)
What Youtube clips?

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Ummmm...

GREVEL (FROM PHONE)
Doesn't matter! Get your ass here
by tomorrow. Tape Monday. Scream to
the fucking heavens, man!

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
I'm on an elephant.

GREVEL (FROM PHONE)
Uh, okay, is that... what?

He glances back to Mona, sees the vulnerable look she's
trying to bury. Also the Bikers in the background and Marks
looking nervous as hell about them.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
We'll do that... We'll talk later.

He hangs up. She's right on him.

MONA
Anything important?

WESTON
No.

MONA
Pregnant.

Wildly differing emotions as he looks at her. He comes up
with:

WESTON
Gestation period for an elephant is
fourteen months. Longest in the
animal kingdom.

MONA
Mine will be shorter.

A tense, telling, exposed beat for both.

WESTON
I want to tell you it will be okay,
and I want that to be true. I don't
know how yet... but I do mean it.

He's sincere, and she reads that from him. It helps keep back tears and they both keep it together. Atop the elephant.

...Which Weston notices is veering off course and heading towards the Sand Vipers standing vigil.

WESTON (CONT'D)
...Uh, no. Stop...

He futilely tries to guide it back like a horse.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Go left, you stupid pachyderm.

But it keeps going. They get up close to the Bikers and Weston smiles big for them. They just glare up at him as the Trainer comes running over to wrangle the elephant.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATE DAY

Clothes get thrown into a suitcase as Weston feverishly packs for immediate departure. Natalie watches him.

NATALIE
Why are you leaving tonight? It's like you're sprinting out of here.

WESTON
No, I just... have to be there early.

NATALIE
Does that mean all this punching and freaking out at work is over?

WESTON
I suppose.
(beat)
Though, I'm finding it very easy to vent about it all.

NATALIE
We have to jump on this opportunity for the school. Slots go fast. And she actually liked it, even though she's pretending not to care.

WESTON
I'll look at trying to move some money around, but you know, it's...

NATALIE
I know. I'm proud of you.

That stops his flurrying. Sincerity gets lost in marriages, and when it lands, it can land hard. It does here.

WESTON

This can be really big for us. Just a trial run. Five episodes not even for broadcast. But it could be...

She knows. The chaos of his mind slows when he sees her simple loving eyes. He gives her a kiss. She kisses back.

DAISY (O.S.)

Barf.

They turn, she's standing in the door. It resets him.

WESTON

And I really have to finish the book and get it to the publishers.

NATALIE

I thought you said you were done.

WESTON

I have maybe a little more to do.

He finishes and gathers his things, looks at them, excitement is fighting its way past anxiety finally.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Ladies... what do we say?

DAISY

Pat Sajack can eat a bag of dicks.

WESTON

...What else do we say?

So dorky, they hate it. But they're happy for him.

NATALIE & DAISY

...Get ready to r--

INT. WESTON'S MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

Weston at the wheel. Spirits up.

WESTON

--Rooooolllll, motherfucker!

Probably been saying it for the last 500 miles. The car phone rings, and the automated voice announces it.

CAR VOICE
You have an incoming calling
from... Puke Face. Would you like
to accept?

He taps the accept button.

WESTON
Davis, we have a Friday night rule
that you're breaking.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - OFFICE - NIGHT

Davis stands in his executive office while HEFNER, 62, old school news man, the big boss, sits down.

DAVIS
Walking on a competing news show?

INTERCUT WITH WESTON IN HIS CAR

WESTON
Good stuff, right?

DAVIS
Slander comes to mind.

WESTON
How were the overnight ratings?

Davis and Hefner exchange an annoyed, binding look.

HEFNER
It's the only reason we're not
firing you.

WESTON
Oh, hey Brenan. It's a good reason
though, isn't it?

HEFNER
Not good enough to renew this
contract at the rate you're asking.

WESTON
I think it is.

DAVIS
No one makes double.

WESTON
You're right. Triple is better.

He grins at his own gall. Hefner steams.

HEFNER
Are you in LA?

WESTON
Just about.

HEFNER
You're a newsman, not a fucking
game show host!

WESTON
Jack of all trades.

HEFNER
We'll sue. And get an injunction.

WESTON
Fire me, which triggers the large
payout you owe me. Fail to come to
terms with my contract, and release
me. Or pay triple and keep me.

Davis looks at Hefner for a clue. He's only getting madder.

HEFNER
This is a dangerous game you're
playing.

WESTON
Nope, just hosting. Okay, I'm
enjoying my week off now. Goodbye.

He hangs up. He cruises for a beat, trying not to let doubt
creep in. Very small:

WESTON (CONT'D)
...shit.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Hollywood sign, walk of fame, Chinese theatre, all that stuff.

INT. WESTON'S MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

The Sunset Boulevard nightlife is always there. Weston peers
at a couple women dressed for clubbing, then their giant
boyfriends. He smiles at them. They actually smile back.

WESTON

You are my demo. You will pay for
everything I want in life.

A small smile and he drives on, up to the Roosevelt Hotel.

INT. HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL - ROOM - NIGHT

Swank room. Big TV. Big view. Suitcases are laid out and Weston strolls. He spreads his arms to the glitz below.

FADE TO:

EXT. CUVEE - PATIO - DAY

A trendy spot on Robertson where people pretend not to rubberneck. Grevel picks at an egg white omelet with a side of kale whatever while Weston goes over some papers.

WESTON

What kind of changes exactly?

GREVEL

Some format stuff. They'll go over it with you on set. It's fucked having to work on the weekend, but it is what it is.

WESTON

I'm fine with it.

GREVEL

I meant me.

WESTON

This is working?

GREVEL

Look.

(nods across the room)

The guy in the stupid chukkas.
Billionaire.

Weston looks. Chukka isn't even 40. He eats with two models.

GREVEL (CONT'D)

Hedge fund money. Now he wants to play movie studio. Fuck him, let him spend, then find out how stupid he is.

WESTON

...I want a billion dollars.

GREVEL

Hey, what was that Youtube stuff?
That was nuts. You reamed those two
idiots, and punched that other guy.

WESTON

Meant every word too. Nice to be
able to combine ideals and work
goals. It was liberating. Saw the
hits are getting up to a million.
The link was on Huffington Post.

GREVEL

That really freaked Tributary out.
They saw it after they chose you.
Actually called and talked about
trying to back out.

WESTON

What!?

GREVEL

Relax, I smoothed it out. They
already committed earlier in the
day and we had the paperwork.

(re: Chukka)

Oop, double afternoon delight.
Fucking asshole.

He watches as Chukka gets up and leaves with the models.
Weston is still locked in.

WESTON

You said get crazy, get something
to go viral.

GREVEL

Yeah, but not, like, unstable. I
meant like an edgy Funny or Die
thing. They thought maybe you were
having psychological problems, or
on drugs. I said no to both those.

WESTON

Jesus...

GREVEL

Don't worry. Everything's good.

Weston's phone buzzes a text. He looks. Mona. "WHERE ARE YOU?
CAN YOU COME OVER?" He puts it away and holds a sigh inside.

GREVEL (CONT'D)
Kick the shit out of these tester
episodes and then it's syndication
and profit participation.

Weston grins through a wince. Or tries to.

INT. TRIBUTARY OFFICES - DAY

CHARLIE BANNER, a 60-year-old seen-it-all executive producer is at his desk fiddling with a baseball. He's on the phone hardassing some deal.

BANNER (INTO PHONE)
...I need at least 70% of the
market... well then you're 14%
short, aren't you?... If we don't
have east coast affiliates we can't
make our numbers and then I'm just
a schmuck for taking a bad deal...

He shakes his head, tired. He grips the baseball, positions his fingers just so. To someone in front of him:

BANNER (CONT'D)
This is how you throw a knuckle
ball.

We see Weston is seated in a chair facing him, listening to him berate the poor bastard. He gets instantly bored arguing.

BANNER (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
...Look, look, look. Shut up. If
you have 56% you have nothing I
want. Get New England by end of day
Monday or I pull the plug and move
on to Pre-Packaged Game Show #278.

He hangs up and keeps fingering the baseball.

BANNER (CONT'D)
Threw a no hitter once senior year
of high school. Scouts came the
next game and I gave up three two-
run homers by the fourth. Still
stings.

A sneer of regret as he reaches around and wedges the ball between two Emmys on his shelf.

WESTON
I was a wrestler.

BANNER

Now there's a business model. You know how much Vince McMahon pulled down last year?

WESTON

A galactic ton.

BANNER

And that was just broadcast rights. Plus live events, merchandising...

WESTON

Maybe I should practice my backbreaker some.

He grins, but Banner has moved on to just staring at him.

BANNER

So you're our face man. Our Seacrest. A little old.

(beat)

My wife said she'd wanna fuck you though.

Weston keeps a medium smile up, not sure what to say.

BANNER (CONT'D)

Well, more than the other guy.

He grabs a headshot from his desk and flashes it.

BANNER (CONT'D)

She's a good barometer for the podunks in Missouri who'll watch this.

WESTON

Podunks are my people.

Banner scoffs as he gets up.

BANNER

No, they're not. You're so patrician you practically scream yacht club. But that's okay.

He takes out some graphic design work and brings it over.

BANNER (CONT'D)

Last minute retooling of the show format.

(MORE)

BANNER (CONT'D)

Leaning to more a *Jeopardy* thing
than a *Price is Right* thing so we
need a whiff of sophistication. Just
a whiff though.

Weston looks at the artwork.

WESTON

This is... quite different.

BANNER

Yeah, but you still just smile and
doe out the questions and prizes
to the cattle that comes in from
Ohio for their big TV moment.

WESTON

...Okay.

BANNER

What's that Youtube shit about?
Just some Bill O'Reilly freakout?

Weston turns to him, about to muster up something.

WESTON

Well...

BANNER

Nah, it's fine. I get it, people
are stupid. Sometimes they have to
be yelled at. Personality is good
outside of the show. Edge is good.
Soft edge. All the way to dangerous
is bad. Sexy is so close to sexist
now it's hard to tell the
difference. You can't be even a
little homophobic anymore. No Jew
stuff. No racist anything. Can't be
a drug guy. Weed is the only thing
you could get away with, but that's
Bill Maher's thing and it's too
dicey for five o'clock anyway.

Weston tries to absorb it all.

BANNER (CONT'D)

What you can be is socially active.
Causes are okay as long as they're
low key. Animal lover is good,
environment is fine just no climate
change talk.

(MORE)

BANNER (CONT'D)

You shouldn't be talking about any of this anyway, just, you know, throwing a line out here and there to show you're deep.

(opens the door, screams)

Hey!

(back to Weston)

Get Pet Monthly or Vegetarian Magazine to put you on their sexy list. National profile shit.

He sizes him up again. Weston isn't sure how to react.

BANNER (CONT'D)

My producer thought you were just a good haircut. I thought maybe more.

A woman, AMITA, 32, beckoned from the yell, comes inside. She's immune from all charms in Hollywood, in life.

BANNER (CONT'D)

This is her, Amita. You'll be fine. Soft edge. But don't leave your guts back in Phoenix. Dig deep for charm because I got an unforgiving streak. I won't let weak chins onto my stage, you understand? I'll bounce you like you're Conan.

Weston waits for more, but finally:

BANNER (CONT'D)

That's it. You ready?

He stands there with Amita. Weston digs deep for that charm.

WESTON

Ready to roll, because this is roc--

BANNER

--We changed the title.

Weston abruptly stops. Okay.

EXT. SUNSET GOWER STUDIOS - DAY

Amita leads him through the small lot, which is mostly empty.

AMITA

The stages are still being rebuilt to the changes. Paying crew double for weekend work so you know someone's gonna get fired.

WESTON

What's it called now?

AMITA

Pacemaker, maybe? Or something.

WESTON

Is there a... catch phrase?

AMITA

There's barely a concept.

WESTON

But the studio still feels good
about this going the distance?

AMITA

As long as their new face doesn't
screw it up.

A look so droll he can barely tell if it's a joke. She guides them to a set of giant elephant doors on a stage. They're cracked open and they both slip inside.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Workers hammer away at building a giant game show backdrop. Hard to tell what it all is exactly, but it's colorful and bursting with lights and oversize props.

Weston stares at it all.

AMITA

Welcome to the bigs, rook.

WESTON

I'm not exactly a...

But she's already left. He looks at it, wondering what to do.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A busy midday coffee crowd. Natalie is in line with a girlfriend, JANET.

NATALIE

Two shot latte with almond milk,
please.

She hands over a credit card to the BARISTA.

JANET

My son hated Gallway at first. By sophomore year he would have run away if we put him back in public.

NATALIE

She's just acting tough because she has to. There's a boy.

JANET

And there will be more. And then eventually there will be men. Then it's over.

They chuckle. The Barista cuts in to Natalie.

BARISTA

I'm sorry, do you have another card? This one didn't go through.

A little awkward for him, more for her. She's incredulous.

NATALIE

...Are you sure?

BARISTA

Ran it twice.

NATALIE

Weird... I'll just use cash.

A slight wince as she takes it back. She sends an embarrassed eye to Janet as she digs for cash.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - OFFICE - DAY

Crisis meeting going on with Davis, Hefner, and a couple other suit and tie MEN, dressed down for Saturday.

HEFNER

He could be bluffing.

DAVIS

He's not bluffing.

HEFNER

I'm not paying him triple.

One of the Suits has an ipad showing Weston punching Wyatt, then cuts to him screaming his duel challenge to the attorney general, then to him saying '...on your knees is the one place you really get to shine' to the Plastic Host.

SUIT #1

Someone made a remix. There's a dance version too. We've certainly never gotten attention like this. Look at all these comments...

Davis looks in, reads.

DAVIS

'I love this dude.' 'This guy is the shit, yo.' 'They figured out how to make me care about news. Now add tits.'

(sighs)

I hate that this is the demo we covet.

HEFNER

Even if we rein him in - under contract or court order - we can't have him behaving like this.

DAVIS

He's just trying to drum up some pizzazz to get the game show.

HEFNER

Are we sure? Are we sure it's not something more, and the pizzazz is just covering it up?

They all consider it.

INT. STAGE - LATE DAY

A giant title design headboard is raised above the stage. "KINGMAKER" is written in fancy cursive letters. Grips go about securing it to the mount.

Weston watches from a podium just underneath. Amita and a STAGE DIRECTOR guide him through paces.

STAGE DIRECTOR

...Okay, so after the opening round we do the walk over and Q&A with the contestants...

He motions Weston to cross the stage with him.

STAGE DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

...listen to all their exciting stories about their teacup collection back home...

He moves Weston along stage.

STAGE DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
...then to our celebrity and he/she
does their bit...

WESTON
Wait, what? Celebrity? We're having
celebrities now?

AMITA
For the mentoring part. They give
them good advice/bad advice.
Whatever.

GRIP
--Coming down.

A piece of rigging crashes on the stage next to Weston. He
hops a little but everyone else is oblivious.

WESTON
When did this happen? Who are the
celebrities?

AMITA
I don't know. People.

WESTON
Like...?

AMITA
Let's say Jennifer Lawrence and
move on remembering that it's
Saturday.

She routes a flustered Weston around the fallen rigging and
takes him over to an "Event Stage".

STAGE DIRECTOR
The Career Path obstacle course.
Act Two. John and Susie Idaho will
have a couple different categories
to choose from...

Weston listens, trying to ignore the sinking feeling.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - MAIN OFFICE AREA - LATE DAY

Polly sits with Davis watching clips of newscasters. ON THE
COMPUTER a bland Man chats with his cohost.

NEWSCASTER #1 (ON THE COMPUTER)
Things are really heating up in
Phoenix this week. Jill, have you--

DAVIS
Christ, no.

Polly switches to a different clip. Slightly different bland.

NEWSCASTER #2 (ON THE COMPUTER)
Tonight, police activity downtown,
just south of Piedmont, as a fiery--

DAVIS
No. Make it stop.

Polly hits pause. Davis scratches his head, frustrated.

POLLY
Dancy is the best of them. He's no
Weston, but, you know.

DAVIS
Dancy can't anchor eleven. He's a
weekend man. Too much eyebrow.

POLLY
Hey, look.

Down the hall, Mona tentatively walks up, looks for and spots
Weston's office, deflates when she sees it's darkened. She
knocks anyway, peaks in through the blinds.

POLLY (CONT'D)
He's not here.

Mona turns, sees them, suddenly sheepish.

MONA
Oh, okay. I figured. Just thought
I'd check.

POLLY
How'd you get in here?

MONA
He gave me a visitor pass.

Doesn't want to make a scene to the strangers, turns to go.

DAVIS
He gave you a visitor pass and
didn't bother to tell you he left
the state? That seems about right.

This halts her. Davis and Polly see the stutter step.

MONA
Right. Of course...

She goes for a 'silly me' gesture but doesn't really sell it. She moves on quick. Davis and Polly look to each other.

DAVIS
What was that?

INT. STAGE - EARLY EVENING

Weston is at a secluded part of the stage, just staring at the half-constructed set. He blankly watches a few Grips negotiate a giant prop of a king's crown.

GRIP
...It has to go behind the Career Milestone.

GRIP #2
No, it goes before it.

GRIP
What sense does that make?

Weston rubs at his eyes. A little too hard. He's in a near trance.

His Phone rings. He lets it go a beat before finally looking at it. Another beat and he answers.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Hey Nat.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Natalie is at the computer, looking at bank accounts.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
What's going on with our accounts?

INTERCUT WITH WESTON ON THE STAGE

Maybe his trance state helps because he takes it in stride.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Oh, I had to move some stuff.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
Yeah, I see that. To where?

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
A different, uh, corporate thing...

The lie refocuses him. He steps out from the wings and moves around the set, going through his marks.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
Why?

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
I just needed a cash flow setup for the dealership. You know, personal versus corporate. It's tax stuff.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
Because I bounced a card or whatever you call it today.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Oh, sorry. I'll straighten it out when I get back. Should have told you about that.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
You think?
(feeling better)
How's it going?

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Great.

He watches vacantly as Prop Guys haul in a giant throne.

WESTON (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
They're adding a celebrity quotient.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
Really. Who?

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
I'm not sure. I heard some talk about Jennifer Lawrence.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
Ooh, she's good.

Prop Guys bump the throne into the dais. The "KINGMAKER" sign wobbles.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
Got to go. Tell Daisy I love her.

He hangs up, continues to stare as the Prop Guys wait to see if the "KINGMAKER" sign will hold. It does.

EXT. FAST FOOD PARKING LOT - NIGHT

In a seating area, Daisy leans against Bran as he watches the Weston GIF on his phone.

BRAN

It's like I want to make fun of him, except he actually is starting to become my hero.

A couple of their friends goof around the fast food lot scoping out cars, looking at trunks.

KID

Found one.

DAISY

My mom's trying to move me by spring semester.

KID

Found another.

It's a Weston/Marks car with Weston's outlined face. He takes out a razor blade and begins carefully peeling it off.

BRAN

Tell her you can't because of your dad's notoriety.

DAISY

Because what about it?

BRAN

It's... traumatizing you.

DAISY

She won't care.

She takes the phone away from him and watches. She zooms up on her father's face.

The other Kids come back from the cars. They have several sticky outlines of Weston's face dangling from their fingers.

KID

Branding.

He slaps one on a window of the fast food place. Then slaps one on his buddy's back. They run off swatting at each other.

BRAN

Say trauma. Because she can't prove that it's not happening.

DAISY
That's completely stupid.

She keeps looking at the video of her father, then to the window branding.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - WESTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

A computer is on and a Word file is open. The title page reads "HARD NEWS BY COLIN WESTON".

Weston stares at it, looks at the page count. 26.

He gets up and paces around his fancy room. He looks out the window at the nightlife below. Giant billboards of models and movie stars. Not a wistful sigh, but a quiet consideration.

He turns back to the room, sees the mini bar. Unopened liquor bottles sit atop the shelf. He just has to stare at it until something else happens.

His phone buzzes and he turns his look to it. It keeps buzzing but he holds his place, staring at it.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Young people are out looking for the next bar to hit. Weston cuts through them as he walks the street. Someone tries to stick a flier in his hand.

WORKER
You want to go to a taping of a show?

Before he can say anything the Man shoves it in his palm and turns his attention to other passing couples.

WORKER (CONT'D)
Hey, you want to see a live show?

Weston glances at the flier.

INT. MUSSO AND FRANK'S - LATER

A glass of seltzer sweats beads onto a coaster at the old Hollywood supper club. Weston fiddles with a swizzle stick as he stares at the flier on the bar. "WHEEL OF FORTUNE - BE AN AUDIENCE MEMBER!"

He uses the swizzle stick and seltzer water to draw an anvil above Pat Sajack's head.

PRETTY WOMAN
He's certainly got it coming.

Weston glances to her. 30, hip, by herself.

PRETTY WOMAN (CONT'D)
Pure evil. Turning those letters
for all those years.

WESTON
That's Vanna. Pat just says, 'your
turn to spin the wheel, Jeff.'

PRETTY WOMAN
I've never actually seen it.
(glances to flier)
Is that an anvil crushing his head?

WESTON
Yes, it is actually. Well done. And
those little bits are splashes of
blood and brains squirting out.

PRETTY WOMAN
That's a lot of game show host
hate.

He gives her a vague smile.

WESTON
I'd love to tell you about *that*
metaphor. Though as soon as I start
my phone will ring. Because life
has no sense of shame.

She's uncertain. His drifting indignation starts to rise.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Didn't use to be that way. I didn't
start like that. Selling an idea
and selling an ideal were not
mutually exclusive.

PRETTY WOMAN
Now I always get those confused.
Does *not* mutually exclusive mean
they are exclusive?

Trying to be charming with her inquisitiveness. Who is this
handsome man? Someone important? Weston looks right through
her.

WESTON

You try and have a point of view, in business, in life. They always merge though. You're a doctor, a mechanic, they're going to merge. Work and life. And then that's the prism from which you view everything. And you find yourself in a town literally based on make believe. You're an actress, right? Out trolling for producers and agents. What do you think that does to your point of view? Selling something that is inherently false. Making shiny objects for a living. Basing everything - our value, our life - on a fat and sedated public's appetite for a shiny bit of manufactured sparkle. Does it flatten your soul? You, probably not, you still got five or six years left before you hit the bad half of your thirties and realize you're not going to make it. But I started out ahead. I always had a brain and a soul. So it hurts more.

She looks at him, attraction having long since curdled.

PRETTY WOMAN

Maybe it's time to take it easy on that seltzer water, Pat.

Weston watches her leave then turns back to the flier.

EXT. SUNSET GOWER STUDIOS - DAY

Banner walks with Weston through the lot.

BANNER

You ever try and go national in the news business?

WESTON

I thought about it a while back. But it hardly seems like news anymore. Just talking heads and celebrity. No --
(coughs)
-- hard news. And if that's the case, then...

Banner cocks an eye at him, small smile.

BANNER

We're doing three, then two. Shoot three episodes on Monday, and two on Tuesday. Buffer time for tweaks.

A young P.A. comes up to him holding up some reports.

P.A.

Do you want these?

Banner just waves him off and keeps moving.

BANNER

If I had my druthers we'd be attaching the pickup to the renewal of one of our talk shows. Make it impossible for them to say no.

(to P.A.)

Hey, wait! Back, back!

The P.A. swings back. Banner sorts through the reports.

BANNER (CONT'D)

...In congress they would call that pork barrel politics...

(to P.A.)

Give me the rest after lunch.

The P.A. heads off again as Banner keeps moving and looks through the papers he selected.

BANNER (CONT'D)

...but we can't get away with D.C.-level fuckery out here. It'd be nice though. You feel good?

He looks back up at Weston, who pulls out the pearly whites.

WESTON

Like a million dollars.

BANNER

A million ain't that much.

WESTON

Then I feel like more.

Banner grins and splits off from Weston.

INT. STAGE - DAY

The set is nearly together. Crew works at making finishing touches. It's pretty elaborate.

Besides the main dais there's different swing sets, full of royal imagery. But also other sets with a Wall Street-like business setting, and another with a Hollywood setting.

Weston stares at it with the Stage Director.

STAGE DIRECTOR
Looks good, huh?

WESTON
It looks like Alice in Wonderland
fucked Las Vegas.

STAGE DIRECTOR
Right?

He heads off. Weston looks at his phone. "17 TEXT MESSAGES".

INT. STAGE - LATER

Amita sits in the "CELEBRITY" seat playing the role as they go through the prep motions. Droll as can be:

AMITA
I think you should take that idea
to Wall Street.

WESTON
Oh, it looks like we have an
endorsement. What'll it be?

Weston looks to a Grip filling in as a contestant.

GRIP
Hollywood.

AMITA
But I'm Angelina Jolie and I give
you my years of experience... and
suggest Wall Street.

GRIP
Okay, Wall Street.

The Stage Director motions from the side.

STAGE DIRECTOR
Then you walk Oklahoma dickhead to
the swing set, and end Act Two. Cut
to selling Pampers and boner pills.

WESTON
How is this more a *Jeopardy* thing?

STAGE DIRECTOR

What?

WESTON

Nothing. I'll be back in a minute.

He walks off the main set and heads toward a far exit.

INT. STAGE - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Weston tracks through a darkened area. He's amid the props. No people around. He stops for a beat and holds on to the edge of a couple stacked storage crates, as if for support.

Suddenly he *smashes his head* against it. Then he does it again, violently. He breathes heavy, steadyng. A trickle of blood slides down the side of his head.

He just stands there calmly, eyes closed.

EXT. HOUSE - BACK PATIO - DAY

Grevel watches a baseball game through his windows while he smokes a cigarette. He's on the phone.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

What kind of conflict?

EXT. SUNSET GOWER STUDIOS - CONTINUOUS

Weston sits on the steps outside the soundstage. He holds a hand to his head, clogging the trickle of blood.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

It's only if they don't fire me,
which they will.

INTERCUT WITH GREVEL AT HIS HOUSE

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

Okay. And if not you quit.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

I can't quit. That triggers a no
compete clause.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

I don't understand. You're just
learning about this now?

Weston gets an incoming call. "WESTON/MARKS". He hits ignore.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

No, I knew it. I just figured it would have played out by now. I made unreasonable demands in the contract renewal. Plus, uh, some theatrics let's say. They have to let me go.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

Okay, well--

(re: baseball game on TV)

--Run, you fuckin' pussy! God damn it.

(back to Weston)

Sorry, fucking Dodgers. Okay, so, all right, they fire you and we're clear for Rock Solid. No worries.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

It's Kingmaker now.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

It is? Okay, well, there you go.

Weston gets another incoming call. "PUKE FACE". Hits ignore.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

The only thing is they found out I was taping these episodes. They know what I'm aiming for.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

Motherfucker! Sorry, game. Uh, that's okay. Doesn't change your stance. It's all a negotiation anyway. We'll figure it out.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

Right.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

Don't worry about it, buddy. It's all good. We'll get you squared away. Just put on a charm offensive and crush this week.

Weston gets a text. From Mona. "YOU'RE A FUCKING ASSHOLE".

WESTON (INTO PHONE)

Yep.

They hang up. Grevel opens the patio door but his WIFE is there and does a 'Nope' and shoos him back out. He grumbles and stubs out the cigarette, 'You happy?' then goes inside.

Weston quietly rubs at his eyes.

INT. FIG AND OLIVE - NIGHT

Nice restaurant. Alone at his table, Weston finishes dinner as he goes over the Kingmaker format script.

A Couple next to him is having an animated conversation as he flips pages. He looks at photographs of his podium and the contestant dais. He reads some script. Quietly, half speaks:

WESTON
...many paths to a rich future. To
a... *rich* future...

The conversation next to him has begun to pick up. Weston peeks up at them. The Man resolutely sets his drink down.

MAN
...I can't keep doing this. I'm
through with it.

WOMAN
'Through with it.' What are you
saying? Are you--?

MAN
I'm saying I want a divorce.

Hard for him to get it out. The Woman is stunned.

Weston watches them. He's entranced, like watching a botched heart surgery. The couple is still relatively quiet.

WOMAN
...this is... how the *fuck* are you
doing this here? *In public.*

MAN
Honestly, I thought it was a way to
make it go more civil. I--

WOMAN
--Are you fucking high? What's
wrong with you? Jesus!

Weston can't look away. Other patrons notice. It's brutal.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
...how is this happening...? What
about the kids?

MAN

They'll be fine. We... we have the right to think about ourselves.

His resolution wobbles too, which causes her tears to flood.

WOMAN

You're such an asshole. I hate you... I hate your fucking guts.

She gets up and hurries out of the restaurant. The Man sighs heavy, a hell just beginning.

Weston sits calmly, quietly. Keeps staring at the Man.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BLOCK - NIGHT

Weston paces, deeply in his head. His pace starts to quicken, a resolute demeanor starting to crack. The heaving starts slow, but it builds. Difficult to hold back the emotion.

A kiosk blocks him, five or six people standing there reading magazines. He looks as if he may literally burst any second. He quick turns the other way into a random shop.

INT. BARBER SHOPPE - CONTINUOUS

The door bells chime as Weston wanders inside. It's empty except two old Barbers and one old client. They look up as he swirls in his emotional whirlwind trying not to lose it.

OLD BARBER

Evening, sir. Can we help you?

Weston finally breaks and a half-stifled quiver starts to take hold of his chin. He sits in a chair. The two old Barbers look to each other, uncertain.

OLD BARBER (CONT'D)

Sir? Sir, are you okay?

It's only a few tears but Weston puts a hand up to cover it. The Barber puts a tentative hand on his shoulder.

OLD BARBER (CONT'D)

Sir?

Weston whimpers a little bit more but is mostly able to pull it together before he really erupts.

OLD BARBER (CONT'D)

Do you need me to call someone?

Suddenly very embarrassed Weston rises again.

WESTON

No, I'm... I'm sorry. I'm sorry to
bother you.

He collects himself and heads back out the door leaving the confused Barber staring after him.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - WESTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Weston sits at the desk with his computer out, the only light in the room. He reads a website, the article "PHOENIX NEWSMAN ON HARD TRUTH KICK". He hits the video clip.

WESTON (ON THE COMPUTER)

...you're the one that brings the
media to its knees... and you do it
because on your knees is the one
place you know you get to shine.

It's a meme, animated with all sorts of new bits. He scrolls to pictures from around Phoenix. One is a pic of a bus stop. It's an ad for KPTV Action News but someone spray painted "THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO" leading up to Colin Weston's name.

The computer flashes its uneven glow on Weston as he stares at the screen, clicking through the posts.

FADE TO:

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - WESTON'S ROOM - BATHROOM - MORNING

Steam covers the mirror. After a beat Weston wipes it and takes a look. He's fresh as a daisy and clear-eyed. Looks like a million bucks. He starts brushing his teeth.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - WESTON'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Casual suit on, Weston ties his shoes. He yawn/stretches his mouth, making the camera ready noises.

A final jacket straighten and he smiles in the mirror.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Weston bounds through the room, all smooth cool.

BALDWIN (O.S.)

Colin. Colin Weston?

It halts Weston. He searches for the voice. Spots him. 45, professional rank, all west coast. He approaches.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)
I'm Neil Baldwin.
(beat)
Scribner Publishing.

His blood might have run cold, but Weston covers it well.

WESTON
Hi...

BALDWIN
Rickard told you I'd stop by?

WESTON
...Did he?

BALDWIN
We have offices out here, and since
you were coming to town... He said
you had the Hard News manuscript?
(beat)
We're all very excited for it.

WESTON
...Right. Right.

Baldwin stands firm, obviously savvy. Both play a careful game. Weston finds his silver tongue.

WESTON (CONT'D)
You know, I didn't bring my
computer with me. I only have a
hard copy, got my notes in it...

BALDWIN
That's fine.

WESTON
Okay. Let me go upstairs and get
it.

BALDWIN
I'll wait here.

Weston heads to the elevator.

INT. HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL - ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Weston quickly scours the internet, the hotel room phone to his ear. He clicks on a few things.

WESTON (INTO PHONE)
I'm going to need you to print
something for me and run it up to
my room. I'll send you the file
now. What's your email?

INT. HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Weston comes back down with a sealed manila envelope, fat
with a document. Baldwin rises as he approaches.

WESTON
Sorry it took so long. I got
slammed with calls. All these
meetings. And I have more I have to
run off to.

He hands over the envelope, looks him square in the eye.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Sorry about all these mix ups and
communication breakdowns. I look
forward to hearing your thoughts.

BALDWIN
Great. Thank you, Colin. We'll be
in touch.

Weston heads out, but looks back with a smile.

WESTON
Call me Wes.

Keeps moving.

INT. TRIBUTARY OFFICES - DAY

THROUGH THE PARTED BLINDS a long line of audience members are
waiting by the stage. Pretty much all tourists.

Weston turns back as the Costumers and Hair people prep him.

AMITA
Just don't imagine they're all
naked.

WESTON
The trick is getting them to
imagine me naked.

He grins at her as the Hair Stylist brushes his hair. Weston
suddenly recoils with an 'Ow!' A trickle of blood rolls down.

HAIR STYLIST

Oh, God. I'm sorry.

Weston dabs at his head. The Hair Stylist peers in his hair.

HAIR STYLIST (CONT'D)

Looks like a nasty gash...

WESTON

It's okay. I cut myself the other day. Bumped into a door.

He dabs at it, blotting.

EXT. SUNSET GOWER STUDIOS - DAY

Weston crosses the lot as the audience is being moved inside. A TEENAGER with his tourist family spots him and points.

TEENAGER

Holy shit, dude. It's Colin Weston from Channel 4.

He slugs his brother, 'Look!' The parents look too. They all seem to confirm it's him.

MOM

We're from Phoenix! Are you a part of this show?

WESTON

The Host.

TEENAGER

That was awesome when you punched that guy.

Weston gives an awkward smile as he moves to his entrance.

MOM

We love your hair.

The Dad looks at his wife. 'What?'

INT. STAGE - BACKSTAGE - DAY

Banner peeks out from the side of the stage. The full house is getting a warm up from an MC. The Stage Director comes up.

BANNER

Is Wink ready?

STAGE DIRECTOR
Haven't seen him. Amita went to get
him ten minutes ago.

INT. STAGE - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A small dressing room. Legs are sprawled on a couch... Two pair... It's Weston and Amita.

But fully clothed. She's holding him, like a mother would a child, only far more awkward. She looks slightly more uncomfortable than he does.

There's a knock on the door. He doesn't move.

AMITA
Well, the bus is here. Time for
school.

WESTON
Yeah.

He gets up, she does too. A careful look.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Thank you. I was more drained from
all this than I realized. Just
needed a bit of emotional...
(beat)
Don't tell any--

AMITA
--Good God, no.

He straightens his suit, looks in the mirror. And smiles.

INT. STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The game stage is dazzling, if overwrought. Lights and colors start to flash and move.

ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
Here's your host... Colin Weston!

The crowd claps and Weston bounds out from behind the stage, all smiles, looking like a movie star.

WESTON
Hi, everyone thanks for joining us
today. Everyone's excited to be
here for our first show, right?

The audience dutifully applauds.

WESTON (CONT'D)
We had a strict Beautiful Person
Only policy in effect today, so
really, applaud for your own
gorgeousness. You deserve it.

They titter. He has the crowd. He flashes the big smile.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Now get ready to roll because this
is Rock Sol-- Kingmaker!

BESIDE THE STAGE Banner glances at Amita.

The unknowing crowd just claps as Weston moves to his podium,
smiling through his wince.

INT. STAGE - LATER

Weston is at his podium. Three CONTESTANTS are at their dais.
A computer board flashes a question.

WESTON
What was the name of Henry VIII's
fourth wife?

The middle contestant, DIRT, Midwest yokel, ponders it.

DIRK
Let's see... I'm actually a history
buff... Aragon, Boleyn, Seymour,
Anne of Cleves... it's Anne of
Cleves.

Weston pauses a dramatic beat.

WESTON
That's right.

Audience claps. Some lights shine around the room.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Okay, Dirk, there you go. You've
earned a walk down the Career Path.

He beckons Dirk over and they start to really discuss it.

WESTON (CONT'D)
What are you thinking? Wall Street
or Hollywood? What is it, money or
fame? Both risky.

Dirk seems to dwell on it. Smiling Weston glances offstage to Amita and the Stage Director. They do a 'keep it moving' gesture.

WESTON (CONT'D)
You said you were a big Aerosmith
fan, right?

DIRK
Huge.

WESTON
They're out in Hollywood.

DIRK
Actually from Boston.

WESTON
Well, their careers are situated
from LA, let me assure you.

DIRK
Tricky.

WESTON
Do you need an assist from our
celebrity kingmaker?

DIRK
Yeah, I think so.

Weston turns to a side panel where a giant throne sits. The lights turn to it.

WESTON
Harry Dean Stanton, you're being
called on.

89-year-old actor HARRY DEAN STANTON sits in the throne like a bag of old shovels.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Lend us some wisdom and help out
Dirk from Boston.

DIRK
I'm from Dayton. Aerosmith is from
Boston.

WESTON
Right. Harry?

HARRY DEAN STANTON
You seem like a bright young man.

DIRK
I'm 46. Got two kids.

HARRY DEAN STANTON
Yep, gotta be young for Hollywood.
I say go for it.

DIRK
Why?

Harry just grins and feebly claps it away.

WESTON
Okay, Dirk, what'll it be? Clock's
ticking.

He gestures up to a clock, which is not ticking. Fraudulent tension sits there. And sits there.

DIRK
Okay, Hollywood.

Weston claps him on the back, and turns to camera.

WESTON
When we come back... the hills of
Beverly!

The lights do their zigging and zagging show and the audience claps. The production goes idle for an Act break pause.

Weston promptly walks offstage into the wings.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A nervy Weston washes his hands in front of the mirror.

WESTON
So god damn sick of all this. Sick of looking at people's ugly fucking horse faces. I swear I'm going to just soil myself. I'm going to sit there caked in my own feces on the stage, or Wall Street Land, and dare the inbred Cornhuskers to say something. This is what you paid for. This is what you get. You don't even care I'm here anyway so long as I eventually die for you.

He stares in the mirror, at his wits end. But the reflection staring back is a polished and smiling Weston. His best self.

WESTON (CONT'D)

I'm sick of getting teased that I can hold it together. It shouldn't have lasted this long. Just let a domino fucking drop. Let me be the failure, but leave me alone and stop following me. I don't want to give you my blood, you invisible fucking vampire.

He sighs heavy at his smiling reflection, breaking his trance. He reaches a hand out to a P.A. who gives him a towel, and seems to have not heard any of it. Did it happen?

WESTON (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Weston shudders before heading back out.

INT. STAGE - LATER

In Wall Street Land, Weston, now wearing a different suit, stands with DOROTHY, 33, who's holding a few bulky prop boards; a DOLLAR SIGN, a LIGHT BULB, and a TV. She's got confusion/excitement going through her. Weston has only anxiety. Sweat on his brow.

WESTON

What do you say, Dorothy? You ready to face the board of directors? You got the idea, the financing, and the marketing.

DOROTHY

...I don't know...

WESTON

Harry?

HARRY DEAN STANTON

Go for it. Yep.

From his throne he points her on. But she wavers.

DOROTHY

...I'm not sure...

WESTON

You have everything you need. All the components.

She still wavers. Weston gets way too conscious of the time clicking away. He looks up to the not-ticking clock, but hears every LOUD TICK.

WESTON (CONT'D)
There's really nothing else.

A bead of sweaty BLOOD rolls down the side of his face from his hairline.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Even Harry Dean Stanton says so.
(beat)
Just go.

A little brusque. She looks at him. He recovers, smiles big.

DOROTHY
You're bleeding.

INT. STAGE CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Banner stands immobile with Amita, glaring as it plays out.

BANNER
Sure, that's what was missing.

The CAMERA pulls a CLOSE UP of the blood dripping.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Weston takes out a handkerchief and dabs at his blood. He keeps up the newscaster/car dealer/game show host face.

WESTON
You ready for that board, Dorothy?

More spooked by his creepy calm than anything:

DOROTHY
...Okay...

WESTON
We're moving on, Harry.

HARRY DEAN STANTON
...Yessssss.

WESTON
Into the boardroom!

They march into another set.

INT. STAGE CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

The Stage Director talks with one of the Engineers.

STAGE DIRECTOR

We can edit after Harry confirms
she should go.

BANNER

How about after, 'Hello, and
welcome...".

A doleful look out to the stage below.

INT. STAGE - LATER

In his third suit, Weston is at his podium and three new contestants are at their dais.

WESTON

Okay, Judy. Who is the only person
to win the Nobel prize twice, and
in two different categories?

Judy has no idea. She hems and haws.

JUDY

...oh, I don't know... Is it...
Albert Einstein?

WESTON

No, I'm sorry. Linus Pauling. For
peace and chemistry. Okay...

From the audience there's some hysterical laughter. It's stark, and singular. Weston tries to smirk it away.

WESTON (CONT'D)

...Okay, we're all having a good
time. Tough question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (O.C.)

It's not tough! Linus Pauling,
easy. She's just fucking stupid.

Some rumbles from the crowd. Weston goes into smile control.

WESTON

Okay, there's no need for that.

INT. STAGE CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Amita and the Stage Director both go for mics.

AMITA

Security, we need a patron escorted out immediately.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Uneasy rumbles as Weston stands, trapped under the lights.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (O.C.)

Not as stupid as you though. You little fucking sissy.

Weston tries to pinpoint the audience member, and finally spots him when he stands. He's a big burly Man, beard, tattoos. Wearing a leather cut. When Guards come at him he pivots enough for Weston to see the Sand Viper emblem.

WESTON

Oh, you got to be kidding me...

IN THE AUDIENCE the Teenager with his family takes out his phone and starts recording.

TEENAGER

Holy shit...

The Sand Viper swats away the Guard with ease. Suddenly two more burly Men stand up. They take off jackets revealing leather cuts and Sand Viper rockers. The first Sand Viper hops the podium and climbs on stage.

INT. STAGE CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Everyone is stunned. Banner and Amita watch as it quickly gets out of control.

STAGE DIRECTOR

Security! More security!

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

A half dozen bikers are now kicking through patrons and unprepared Security Guards moving towards the stage.

Weston is a deer in headlights. The lead Viper approaches.

SAND VIPER
You look scared? Why are you
scared?

The other Bikers tromp up to the stage, rattle the set pieces, spook the contestants.

WESTON
...What are you doing?

SAND VIPER
Supposed to give you a message from
our brothers in Phoenix.

WESTON
...right... now?

SAND VIPER
Why not now? You busy?

More Guards flood the stages. Some small scuffles but not too unruly.

SAND VIPER (CONT'D)
They say you're in deep. Wanted us
to relay our strict finance policy.

He gets in close to Weston's face. He's rattled, but holds his ground, more out of paralysis.

SAND VIPER (CONT'D)
NO LATE PAYMENTS.

Weston nods 'okay,' barely able to blink, his head doing somersaults, almost wondering if it's all real.

The Guards have control of the other bikers, who were never putting up a real fight, just causing a disruption. Guards come on the stage for the lead Viper. Before they get to him he throws an arm around the frozen Weston and smiles big for the crowd, like the two are a team accepting applause.

INT. TRIBUTARY OFFICES - LATE DAY

Weston is barely any less stilted as he sits on the couch. Banner and Amita are speechless as well. Finally:

BANNER
We have coverage to cut around all
the fuck ups?

AMITA

Probably. Second episode might be
tough. And the third.

Banner chews on it. Quietly stares at the spaced out Weston.

BANNER

If the stage wasn't already rented
for tomorrow, the sets built, and
the crew paid for...

Weston zones back in, matches eyes with Banner.

BANNER (CONT'D)

Nice retirement plan in Phoenix?

Barely a drip of emotion from Weston.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - OFFICE - EVENING

A crowd is gathered around a desk watching a computer. Susan Sanchez is laughing louder than anyone. Polly is behind her.

SUSAN SANCHEZ

Play it again, play it again!

Polly spots Davis and waves him over.

POLLY

Come here!

Davis gets close to see the computer as it replays.

ON THE COMPUTER chaos erupts and the lead Viper marches up to Weston, who from the phone camera, looks especially stricken.

SAND VIPER (ON THE COMPUTER)

You look scared? Why are you
scared?

Susan erupts with laughter again.

SUSAN SANCHEZ

That's my favorite part!

Davis watches, rapt.

DAVIS

What else were they saying?

POLLY

He said 'no late payments'.

Davis is agog.

POLLY (CONT'D)
How do you end up owing a biker
gang money?

The computer pauses on the image of the smiling Sand Viper with his arm around the stricken Weston.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

The same paused image of Weston and the Sand Viper is on the computer. Natalie is on the phone. Daisy sits at the desk, looking at the image.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
...so it was *not* a stunt?

INT. WESTON'S MERCEDES (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

A still spaced Weston drives down Sunset, talking on the speaker phone.

WESTON
No, but it was fine. They were
just... being a little rowdy.

INTERCUT WITH NATALIE AT HOME

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
Because I've seen those guys here.

DAISY
They're hardcore bikers. Some of
their patches mean they've killed
for the club.

NATALIE
Daisy, shut up. I'm talking.

WESTON
Same motorcycle club. They were
just the LA branch, whatever you
call it.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)
...Okay. If everything's fine.
How'd it go otherwise?

He can barely muster the lie.

WESTON

...Great.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)

Really? You sound not as excited as
you're supposed to...

WESTON

I'm just tired. Long day.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)

Okay. I'll let you go. Oh, how'd
Jennifer Lawrence look?

WESTON

Older than you'd expect.

NATALIE (INTO PHONE)

I knew it. All right, I love you.
Get some sleep.

WESTON

...Love you.

She hangs up.

He's stopped at a traffic light. Deep in his head. He watches as a Toyota inches its way into traffic at a yellow light. It just barely veers away from a speeding Mercedes. Screeching tires and honking horns. Almost a devastating collision.

Weston just waits there for a beat, watching the scene that almost happened. Dwelling on it.

INT. HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Weston paces into the hotel. At the couches, Baldwin, the Scribner editor, has been waiting. He stands with the manila envelope in his hand. Weston barely stutters at all.

BALDWIN

Mr. Weston.

WESTON

Editor publishing guy. Sorry I
didn't commit your memory to name.
I mean your... name to memory.

He plops down on the couch. Baldwin calmly sits down.

BALDWIN

I had a chance to go over your
manuscript.

He touches the envelope. Weston plays it steady, nods "sure".

BALDWIN (CONT'D)

I thought it was interesting you chose to write your memoirs from the perspective of a young girl.

WESTON

I had to find a way to spruce it up.

Baldwin opens the envelope and straightens the pages. The title page reads "THE ADVENTURES OF PIPPI LONGSTOCKING BY ASTRID LINDGREN". The author's name is scratched out and "COLIN WESTON" is penciled in.

BALDWIN

Did you take a job hosting a game show?

WESTON

The best answer I can give you to that is maybe. At the moment that's accurate.

BALDWIN

This undermines the credibility, such that it is, of marketing a newsman's memoir, don't you think?

Weston just calmly nods that it does. Baldwin finally gets tired of the pretenses.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)

Our lawyers will be in contact. We'll be suing you for reimbursement of funds. And fraud if possible.

(gets up)

Good luck with the game show.

He heads out. Weston sits there a beat. He takes out his phone, opens the internet. He goes to a 'NEWS ANCHOR SPEAKS HARD TRUTH' site. Looks at the hit count. '2,385,325'.

He scrolls through a web search. There's hundreds of sites carrying stories. 'ANGRY ANCHOR IN BIKER BRAWL,' 'FIGHTING NEWSMAN PALS WITH BIKERS'. The screen shot of the lead Viper with his arm wrapped around him is everywhere. Memes are already up. Weston and the Viper embracing at the Grand Canyon. At the White House. At a gay wedding.

HIPSTER

You're him. You're that guy.

Weston looks up. A couple guys with interesting facial hair and ugly shoes stop as they're passing through the lobby.

HIPSTER (CONT'D)
No way, dude, do you mind?

He holds up his phone 'can I take a selfie?' Without waiting for a response he moves in close to Weston, who barely moves or changes his empty expression, as he takes a pic.

The Hipsters smile a 'right on' and move along their way. Weston just stares ahead.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - WESTON'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Weston shuffles inside, looking whipped by the day, the month, the year. He takes off his jacket but stutters a moment when he sees Mona is there.

She stands and they face off, both more flustered and anticipatory than angry.

MONA
I called the local fancy hotels,
asked if you were staying. The maid
let me in. I said I was your wife.

He nods 'right,' seems to take her presence in stride. He paces by her, to the window, glances outside.

WESTON
This hotel is supposed to be
haunted. Montgomery Clift, Marilyn
Monroe both lost their shit here.

He looks out at the ledge, the long drop to the street below.

MONA
There's worse places to lose it.

He turns back around and tosses his jacket on the bureau, but his aim goes askew and it knocks into the liquor on the adjoining minibar. A couple bottles fall. He stares at them.

MONA (CONT'D)
When I got in the car it was rage.
Then self-pity, then pining. Not
sure what it is now. It's not
acceptance. It's something else.

WESTON
Perfectly handled chaos.

MONA

No.

Weston finally turns his look from the Jack Daniels.

WESTON

I'm not sure I was talking about
you.

MONA

Oh, bullshit, Wes. You make all
your own choices, and you pride
yourself on understanding the world
better than everyone else.

He quietly sits on the bed, closes his eyes at that.

MONA (CONT'D)

This is happening to me, not you.

A heavy beat. She walks closer to him, right in front of him.

WESTON

Something else is happening to me.

He looks at her. Sees right past her to his own reflection in the mirror. Once again, polished and smiling. His best self.

MONA

Oh, you're the one who's going to
deal with this? Have to raise a
child alone and tell her she's the
result of bad judgement...

She starts to pace as she rants. But it drowns out with WHITE NOISE. *The whole visage starts to shake slightly.*

Weston quietly holds his head.

WESTON

...I think I'm having a nervous
breakdown.

She doesn't hear it. He looks at her, but she tunnels, starts to mute.

BLACKNESS

She fades back in. Just a blip. She catches sight of him.

MONA

...Hey. Hey...

It's dull. She tunnels again.

BLACKNESS

Fades back in.

MONA (CONT'D)
Wes... Wes... Hey.

She's on him now, and he focuses on her. She props him up.

MONA (CONT'D)
Just relax, you jackass.

A look of vague compassion. His head is swimming.

MONA (CONT'D)
Hang on.

She gets up and heads into the bathroom.

IN THE BATHROOM she goes for a towel, runs it under water.

MONA (CONT'D)
Pretty sure I'm the one who's
supposed to be having fainting
spells. I'm not... I don't expect
you to leave your family.

She rings it out and heads back.

IN THE MAIN ROOM she walks in with the cold rag.

MONA (CONT'D)
I just knew it would be easier to
talk here and settle some things
without our lives in the way...

Weston is gone. She looks around, incredulous. Pissed.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD STREETS - NIGHT

The glitz gives way to some of the seedier LA elements. More liquor stores. More pawn shops. More XXX joints.

INT. WESTON'S MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

Weston drives, a blank look on his face.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREETS - NIGHT

The glitz gives way to some of the seedier LA elements. More liquor stores. More pawn shops. More XXX joints.

INT. WESTON'S MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

The empty gas light is on. The car starts to chug chug clunk. That bad sound as it dies. Weston just stares at it blankly.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Mercedes pulls off the road gurgling its last breath. Run down corner shops and crappy squat houses all around. Weston gets out. He ambles a bit, bends to tie his shoe. His face is right next to the smiling etch of his face on the trunk. The real and the fake. He gets up, starts walking.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Cars fly by Weston, he barely flinches. He passes a bus stop. A few tough youths, all black and Latino, give him some hard stares. Way out of his element, he doesn't acknowledge them.

EXT. CITY BLOCK - LATER

Cars *whizz* by. Some of them honk. Weston is a step away from the speeding cars, almost teetering. He looks at the road a beat, lost in contemplation.

He then looks up at the sad, shitty block to which he's wandered. Laundromat, liquor store, corner market. And a hole in the wall bar.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A shot glass sits on the counter. Scotch tips forward and fills the glass. Weston takes the glass and holds it.

An African American female Bartender watches him.

BARTENDER
You do this a lot?

WESTON
No. I don't really drink anymore.

BARTENDER
That ain't what I meant.

She gestures to the bar. A run down dump and not a white face to be seen. Tough crowd too. A few look at him, well-to-do white guy in his expensive suit. A couple stools over a YOUNG GANG HOOD stares at him. Weston faces forward, unconcerned.

WESTON

You know LA had one of the highest crime rates in the country just fifteen years ago? Not anymore. It's safer than most big cities.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - OFFICE - NIGHT

Davis sits with Hefner and a few other suits, computers with pics of Weston and the Viper are out.

SUIT #1

Ratings and awareness are as high as we've ever seen them. It's a question of what that's worth.

DAVIS

We know where his bargaining position is coming from, at least. He's hard up for cash.

Hefner looks at other memes of Weston walking onto the morning show set.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Weston looks at the Bartender.

WESTON

In the same time span Facebook, Twitter, all-access-media-all-the-time becomes omnipresent, violent crime goes down. That seem weird to you?

BARTENDER

That ain't what seem weird to me.

WESTON

It can't reach everybody though, pervasive as it is. Some are always going to stick with crime.

He lazily gestures to the Hood as he examines the scotch. The Bartender's eyes go wide. The Hood keeps very still.

LEROY

You, uh, you sayin' somethin' to me?

Weston doesn't waver. Bartender tries to make cool.

BARTENDER

Leroy, he didn't...

WESTON

The worst crimes are the ones you never hear about. The government burying the cure for cancer, CEOs buying the white house.

RANDOM PATRON

Ain't no cure for cancer. You can't buy the white house.

WESTON

That's what I just said. Keep up.
(back to the Bartender)

The bullshit stickup stuff Leroy here pulls is just something a talking head blathers on about on local news in a place like, let's say Phoenix. People forget *immediately*. It just doesn't matter. He doesn't make a lasting impression. You know who does though? That blathering talking head. You know why? Capped teeth.

LEROY

Is that the way of it?

Movement is starting to happen in the bar as Leroy moves in. Weston still doesn't waver. He turns directly to Leroy.

WESTON

What's the worst thing you ever did?

LEROY

I'm about to show you.

WESTON

Before you do, let me see if I can explain to you why you don't matter. I've been told I have a gift of charm and persuasion.

Leroy dead eyes a fearless Weston.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - DAISY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Daisy ichats with Bran. But she has another window open on her ipad. Sites of Weston and his antics.

BRAN (FROM ICHAT)
...I knew this kid from Gallway
once. We went to summer camp
together back in the day. He would
only go to the bathroom when
everyone else left.

Barely paying attention to him, Daisy clicks on a site that claims 'NEW RAW FEED OF CRAZY ANCHOR'. She clicks on it and it shows Weston bellowing his '...fuck, fuck, fuck...' rant in the studio. Daisy frowns a little at it.

BRAN (FROM ICHAT) (CONT'D)
Didn't want to take his pants down
in front of us or something.

DAISY
Yeah, whatever. I got to go.

Before Bran can object she clicks him away, drops the ipad and heads down the hall.

INT. WESTON'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Daisy knocks on the door and peeks inside. Natalie sits on the bed going over papers.

DAISY
Hey, mom?

Natalie looks up, 'Yeah?'

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Several other Men have come up to stand behind Weston. Leroy maintains a cool calm, never breaking eye contact.

WESTON
First, I want to eliminate race.
That has nothing to do with it. I'm
going to guess you're poor.
Correct?

LEROY
Ain't rich.

WESTON
Okay, also not a factor. You see,
people will look at a man, listen
to a man, buy *anything* from a man
as long as he appears to know more
than them.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - WESTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Natalie lies on the bed, fighting back the sadness and anger and confusion and disappointment.

WESTON (V.O.)
It doesn't matter if he does. It
doesn't matter if he's good. It
doesn't even matter if he has
anything worth a damn to sell.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Weston continues to the quiet but bristling room. He lifts the still untouched scotch.

WESTON
Because people secretly want to be told how stupid they are. Directly or indirectly.

He sets the scotch back down.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Mostly indirectly because they lack any kind of self-awareness or perspicacity -- that means wits.

POP! Leroy suddenly punches Weston square in the face for the condescension. Startled, Weston is able to stay on his stool. A bit of blood drips from his lip.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Whoa. Good jab there, Leroy. Caught me off guard. But, stay with me...

Leroy and the crowd stays primed but Weston keeps his cool.

WESTON (CONT'D)
I've been selling to people for years. Insurance, cars, ideas, smiles, promises.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Weston's face looms large over Phoenix on a billboard.

WESTON (V.O.)
They're all so willing to believe.
And trust me, you can make a juggler doubt he has hands with a smile and a good enough line.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Weston is clear-eyed. Leroy is calm, but on a hair-trigger.

WESTON

It gets to the point where you start to wonder what's wrong with them. What's a person's capacity to ingest so much nonsense and bullshit? Turns out quite a lot. They like the taste. You know what I'm talking about, Leroy.

POP! Leroy smacks him again. Weston's head violently jerks to the punch but he stays on his stool. More blood from his lip.

WESTON (CONT'D)

...Woof. Okay, here you go. Because I can sense you have somewhere to be. Honest about self now. The self-sabotage and bad choices - that's part personal weakness...

INT. TRIBUTARY OFFICES - NIGHT

In the edit bay, Amita goes over footage of the taping with an Editor. She comes to a camera shot of Weston frazzled.

WESTON (V.O.)

But the other part, really the most important part, was because I knew it wouldn't matter. Because people prefer the lie.

The Editor comes up with a different shot and Weston looks like a million bucks, his best self.

AMITA

That one.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Weston keeps the moment going, jitters just starting to peek out under the surface.

WESTON

And in the end, no matter how significant the truth is, a pretty lie will last longer.

Leroy is cool as ice. Weston looks at him.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Are you understanding this? You want me to do a baseball metaphor about Astroturf?

POP! Another punch. Weston wobbles hard, getting dizzy.

WESTON (CONT'D)

Shit, Leroy. You're right, that doesn't hold because Astroturf sucks and everyone hates it. Okay, I'm almost done.

He lowers his head, looks level at the scotch.

WESTON (CONT'D)

This is where you come in. You see, you're reality. I'm the lie. You might rob somebody, Leroy, you might kill them, but I smile at them. Now, do you understand why none of you faggots matter?

Leroy violently slams Weston's face to the counter. In a rush all the other Men pile on.

EXT. CITY STREET - EARLY MORNING

The dawn breaks and new sunlight begins its crawl over the cityscape.

INT. HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL - ROOM - MORNING

Light shines into the room. The bed is ruffled and legs begin to stir. Mona wakes up. Bleary, tired eyes. Not a lot of sleep. She looks around the room. No one but her.

INT. TRIBUTARY OFFICES - DAY

Banner looks at the internet with Amita as the Stage Director goes over a schedule.

BANNER

The great divide between the public's taste and my taste is so vast you could fit a couple solar systems in it.

They watch memes of Weston and the lead Viper superimposed on police footage of a bank robbery, cc footage of a convenience store hold up, and home video of a junior high dance recital.

BANNER (CONT'D)

Lucky I don't have to understand
them to exploit them.

AMITA

Almost a million hits already.

STAGE DIRECTOR

Got to get tighter on camera phone
security.

Banner and Amita look up at him.

AMITA

Maybe remind them to make sure
they're fully charged.

INT. HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

A RECEPTIONIST smiles as a guest approaches.

RECEPTIONIST

Checking in?

Natalie and Daisy each have a day bag

NATALIE

My husband's actually already
checked in. We're just joining him.
Can you tell me which room?

She turns back to Daisy. 'Good idea to come.'

INT. NEWS STUDIO - OFFICE - DAY

Davis and Hefner have Weston's contract on the desk.

DAVIS

If we want to keep him I can deal
with him. He's a giant pain in my
ass, but I can take up yoga or
something if it means keeping the
demo for another decade. We know
where it's all been coming from
now, so we can get ahead of it.

Hefner just glances at him, 'Can we?'

HEFNER

What's crazy worth?

DAVIS

If he's cash hungry, and got some little pixie on the side he's trying to keep secret, we can probably hardline for a better deal.

Hefner looks at a picture of a smiling Weston on the wall.

HEFNER

Hard to trust a desperate man.

EXT. SUNSET GOWER STUDIOS - DAY

A long line of tourists wait for the taping. Amita walks by, half of them watch footage on their phone of the Sand Vipers taking the stage, or other Weston memes. A P.A. directs them.

P.A.

Okay, we're going to start taking you in in groups now...

INT. TRIBUTARY OFFICES - LATER

Banner is on the phone, getting hot. Amita goes over prep.

BANNER (INTO PHONE)

...I don't know, he's not answering his phone.

INT. TALENT AGENCY - DAY

Grevel is on the phone in his office.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)

I'm sure he's on his way. Traffic is, you know... balls.

INTERCUT WITH BANNER AT THE TRIBUTARY OFFICES

BANNER (INTO PHONE)

I don't care about traffic. I care about my empty stage, and I'm already past start time.

A squawk comes in over Amita's headset.

AMITA

They got him at the gate. He's going to change in his dressing room.

BANNER (INTO PHONE)
Neat trick.

GREVEL (INTO PHONE)
Happy to help.

They hang up. Banner sighs. He picks up his baseball. Fixes the knuckle ball grip. He sighs again.

INT. STAGE - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Amita moves through the narrow halls and comes to Weston's door. It's closed, she knocks.

AMITA
Hey, you good?

Nothing. She knocks again.

AMITA (CONT'D)
Wes? We're past cameras ready.

Nothing. She tries the door. It's locked. She's about to speak into her headset, but then through the door--

WESTON (O.S.)
Give me just a second.

She lets go the headset mic.

INT. STAGE - WESTON'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A rumpled, torn suit is on the couch.

FROM BEHIND, Weston wears a crisp, new suit. Hair is perfect. He's at the vanity mirror. Make up jars are open on the counter and he's applying it.

CLOSE UP REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR as he dabs at his face.

WESTON
...just have to put the illusion
together...

He's talking quietly, more to himself.

WESTON (CONT'D)
...suit, face, smile...

AMITA (O.S.)
What? I can't hear you.

He dabs a few more spots.

WESTON
...all the pieces...

He steps back, looks in the mirror.

Pretty much the man on the billboards. A little bit of a thick tan from the extra make up, but cleaned up nice.

He stares at himself and flashes the smile. Pure Weston.

INT. STAGE - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Amita waits outside, gets a squawk from the headset.

AMITA
They're asking if you're ready to start the intro.

WESTON (O.S.)
Tell them to roll, I'm headed to stage.

AMITA (INTO HEADET)
That's affirmative. We're ready.
He's on his way.

A P.A. comes up from behind Amita.

P.A.
Is he coming?

She turns around to the P.A.

AMITA
I just told them--

The door opens and Weston blows right past her toward the stage.

AMITA (INTO HEADET) (CONT'D)
Walking up.

She follows after Weston.

INT. STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The audience is packed and loaded. Excitement is up.

At the far end on the front row, Natalie and Daisy sit quietly, noticeably out of rhythm with everybody else.

DAISY
Mom, let's just go.

But Natalie has a tense, bristling look to her. Just then the lights start zig zagging doing their thing. The crowd cheers.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
It's time for Kingmaker!

Daisy grimaces quietly.

INT. STAGE - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

TRACK Weston as he quickly moves through the narrow halls, Amita trailing him. A Stage Hand spots him just as he passes by. She blanches as he heads out.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

The room is full and ready.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Here's your host... Colin Weston!

Weston bounds out from the side and heads center stage.

WESTON
Good athternoon, and thankths for
coming out...

There's a collective gasp from the audience. Weston's face is beaten to a pulp. Poorly applied make up doesn't come close to covering the cuts and bruising. A large gash with barely fresh scabbing runs down his cheek from temple to lip. At least three teeth are missing. One eye is near shut from swelling.

Natalie is stricken silent, Daisy screams.

WESTON (CONT'D)
Thith ith day two of our queth to
crown a king...

He's in oblivion as he goes on.

BESIDE THE STAGE Amita finally sees him in the light.

AMITA
Oh, my God...

INT. STAGE CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

The engineers are dumbstruck. Banner tries to set his coffee down but it misses the table.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

The audience is audibly rumbling. Camera phones come out.

WESTON

I hope you brought your dreamth,
becauth we're here to make them.

He starts to get the hint of off rhythm from the audience.

WESTON (CONT'D)

We have Harry Dean Thtanton back.
Harry...

He looks back to the throne. Harry sits there squinting at Weston, uncertain.

Weston looks queerly at the audience.

WESTON (CONT'D)

All right, people. We need
energy...

DAISY (O.S.)

Dad!

It startles him. He looks around.

DAISY (CONT'D)

Dad!

Daisy moves forward tentatively from the seats. Natalie puts a hand on her to stop, but not forceful. The Security Guards are so thrown by Weston she slips by them.

Weston finally spots her, sees her horrified face.

WESTON

Daise?

Suddenly, it turns for him. Seeing her begins the flood.

DAISY

...Dad, what happened to you?

All at once he can hear the crowd rumbling in stupefied awe.
All at once the pain, the shame.

INT. STAGE CONTROL BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Everyone is transfixed.

ENGINEER

...What... what do we...

BANNER

Cut tape.

Banner snaps out of it when the Engineer delays.

BANNER (CONT'D)

Now, god damn it! Cut the fucking
tape!

The Engineer does. Recording lights go dim. The screens are still up though. ON THE MONITOR Weston now looks like a wounded animal in flood lights. He backs away from Daisy as she approaches.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Daisy makes her way forward to Weston. Fear and worry start to come out of her. Which just pushes it all into overdrive for him. He continues backing up as she moves to him.

DAISY

Dad, what's going on?

WESTON

...I'm doing the... show...

Last grasps, clinging to the delusion... He looks out and sees the entranced, gawking crowd. It starts to overwhelm him.

DAISY

What's wrong with you? Why are you
acting this way?

NATALIE

Daisy.

She has come toward them, still mystified by it all, but she has found her grounding.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Daisy, come here.

Daisy stays on her father.

DAISY

Who was the woman in your room?

The daughter asks, but it's Natalie who has eyes on Weston. The whole family together now, center stage, spotlights.

Weston looks at his wife, the sadness and anger in her eyes brings it crashing down. He looks to his daughter. The same.

He looks out to the audience. Then next to all the cameras he sees a monitor showing his mangled, wrecked image.

WESTON

Oh, my.

He finally looks back at Natalie and Daisy, seems to have found some control. He's about to speak, then reconsiders.

NATALIE

Wes...

He looks away from them. Then moves to the monitor at the side of the stage, picking up pace. He's almost running for it...

...And attacks it, ferociously, clumsily, knocking it over. His picture blips out. In his fervor he turns to the random CAMERAMAN capturing his image. Weston goes at him with sloppy blind rage. The Cameraman has no clue what to do.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Wes!

Weston keeps at him, dragging the man down, pummeling him. Weston grabs a blunt piece of the smashed monitor and rears it back to hit the Cameraman. The audience gasps in horror...

A GRIP rushes in and tackles Weston. He struggles, but in an instant more Grips are in the fray pinning him to the ground.

Natalie and Daisy watch in complete and total horror.

Weston fights the hands keeping him down, fighting with everything he has left, screaming, letting out all his demons, but he's stuck, going nowhere, forced to keep them.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

"20 MONTHS LATER"

EXT. PRISON - DAY

A bleak, gray place. A taxi waits for a lone person walking from the structure.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

You spent the first five months of
your sentence in the medical ward.

WESTON (V.O.)

Medical ward and pysch ward, yes.
Then eventually they moved me into
general population.

Weston gets into the taxi and it drives away.

INT. TAXI (MOVING) - LATER

Weston sits in the back. His face is healed, but he now has a
large, vivid scar running across his cheek.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Were you surprised to learn that a
federal case had been in the works
against you? Do you even remember
your sentencing?

WESTON (V.O.)

I honestly don't know. I don't know
if I remember it, or just lawyers
telling me about it later. It
happened so soon after Los Angeles.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Bank fraud, misappropriation of
funds, and falsifying federal tax
records related to your part
ownership in a Phoenix car
dealership.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

The INTERVIEWER, a woman, 45, all professional, looks
directly at her subject, Colin Weston. He has a solemn, but
clear and open expression.

WESTON

Yes. And then later I was sued for
divorce, as well as recovery of
funds from a publishing house.

He says it regretfully, but poised.

INTERVIEWER

You lost your position as news
anchor for KPTV news.

WESTON

Yeah, well, that one was a certainty.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Weston walks up to a modest two-story complex and heads to an apartment. Unlocks it.

WESTON (V.O.)

After the conviction they found I had violated some ethics clauses so they were able to void any payments or buyouts for early termination.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A simple, modest one-bedroom. Furniture and decoration is on the medium-to-low end.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

And of course the game show you were hosting never materialized. With you or anyone else.

WESTON (V.O.)

No. I suppose it would have been hard for them to move forward after all the... notoriety.

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

The Interviewer stays on Weston.

INTERVIEWER

Some phone camera footage leaked out. Have you seen it?

WESTON

Yeah, I've seen it. It's... tough. I am grateful that Charlie Banner cut tape when it started... when I started... It surely would have leaked, and in full audio and hi-def, it would have been so much worse. I appreciate his integrity at that moment.

INTERVIEWER

What do you remember about that taping?

Hard, but Weston digs deep.

WESTON

I remember two things. I remember the Kingmaker emblem was crooked on the dais. Weirdly, I don't know why I remember that. And I remember my daughter's face when she first called out to me and approached the stage.

It chokes him. But he keeps it together.

INTERVIEWER

Have you spoken to her?

WESTON

Yeah. Lots of times. We see each other fairly regularly. And I have a young son that lives with his mother.

INTERVIEWER

But you don't see her. Or your ex-wife.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

A billboard looms over a busy street. "KPTV ACTION NEWS WITH SUSAN SANCHEZ AND PETER DANCY" Their smiling faces greet the city.

WESTON (V.O.)

No.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

After so much attention, what do you expect the public to think about you?

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Weston considers the question heavily.

WESTON

Well, I had a spectacularly public embarrassment. All my sins and shortcomings on full display. And they all got away from me, and I just popped. The medical profession calls it an acute time-limited reactive disorder.

INTERVIEWER

But...

WESTON

But, the thing is, I hold fast to much of what I said. It wasn't all just a ploy for ratings, or attention, or contract leverage. People reacted because they saw something real mixed up in it. I was offering something that they wanted, and that was a yearning to speak the truth. That's what I think they reacted to, so I can't apologize for that.

INTERVIEWER

And that's how you would want to leave the public thinking about your story?

WESTON

I don't want to leave them with it, I want them to continue thinking about it. Because my story's not a flameout story.

He looks to the camera.

WESTON (CONT'D)

It's a comeback story.

He smiles his million dollar smile, now with scar.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END