

VERVE

intimacy

by
Sam Rubinek

INT. BEDROOM - MANSION - MORNING

The CAMERA moves through a sleek, modern and expensive space.

As we SNAKE through the living room, we see that there isn't much soul in the design. Bauhaus chairs, glass coffee table, a bar cart, blank walls.

We continue into the hallway, where there are a few personal touches that make it feel slightly less curated. Intimate black and white shots of a couple (whom we'll come to know as Carson and Jay) hanging on the narrow walls. A Norman Rockwell propaganda poster from WWII. A strange little wooden chair that they got on their honeymoon in Amsterdam.

As we continue through the hallway, we start to hear the sounds of sex.

We push into the BEDROOM, which unlike the rest of the house, feels lived in, cozy and personalized. Out of focus, in the background, two figures (Carson and Jay) in bed are in the middle of things. The movements start to slow. They try to change positions awkwardly.

JAY (O.S.)
Sorry. I lost it.

CARSON (O.S.)
Don't worry about it.

Jay falls onto his back as Carson heads into the adjacent bathroom.

As we hold this image, we hear the sound of urinating, then a flush, then the faucet running. Carson returns to the bed and lies next to Jay.

We CRANE UP until the bed and its occupants are visible in an AERIAL SHOT, now in focus for the first time.

CARSON, 31, movie star good looks because, well, she is one, outwardly sweet-natured, privately calculating, still figuring out how to handle her fame. She is looking at her husband, whose back is to her.

He is JAY, 42, handsome, a struggling but uncompromising playwright whose dry wit barely masks his bruised masculinity and unvented anger. We HOLD THIS IMAGE.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

INTIMACY

CUT TO:

INT. BLACK LUXURY SUV (MOVING) - DAY

Jay, wearing jeans and an untucked wrinkled button down, and Carson, wearing expensive yoga pants and a tight-fitting hoodie, sit in the backseat. A DRIVER in the front.

CARSON

I'm surprised you were so gung-ho
to do this.

JAY

I wouldn't say I was *gung-ho*.

CARSON

Insistent.

JAY

Okay...

CARSON

This just isn't really your thing.

JAY

I mean it's just a flashback.
Pretty straightforward.

CARSON

I am happy you're doing it. I'll
definitely be more comfortable with
you then like some rando actor guy.

JAY

No right...

(pause)

Do you think this is gonna take a
long time though?

CARSON

It's just a formality. It's you,
so... it'll be fast.

They smile at each other. Then their smiles fade as they sit
in anticipatory silence.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Simple, clean and modern. The entire space is enclosed in
glass, which offers a stunning view of Los Angeles.

Over the bed, there is a generic PAINTING of two figures in a
small boat riding atop a serene sea.

One Queen-sized BED, off of which is a sitting area consisting of a COUCH, TWO CHAIRS and a COFFEE TABLE.

A small KITCHEN area, with a minibar and glasses. Next to the sitting area is a BATHROOM, the door of which is closed.

Jay is sitting on the bed, tapping his foot manically. He gets up and tiptoes over to the bathroom door, presses his ear against it. Listens intently. Hears the faucet running.

INT. BATHROOM - HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Carson in front of the sink. The faucet sound covers the noise of her crushing a WHITE POWDER on the surface of her phone. She divides the powder into two lines and snorts them with a rolled-up BILL.

She shuts off the water and looks at herself in the mirror, checking her nose and general appearance. She goes into her purse and grabs a NICOTINE PATCH. Places it on her arm. She opens the door and into --

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

-- and we follow her over to the seating area. She sits down on the couch and glances over at Jay, who is seated once again on the bed, trying to act casual.

Carson starts scrolling on her phone. Jay resumes tapping his foot nervously.

JAY

So are we going to get started or--

CARSON

We're just waiting for them to call lunch.

JAY

Oh okay.

(beat)

Because they said for us to get here at four and it's way past--

CARSON

Four was just an estimate. They don't know exactly when lunch will be. If you're patient about this, it would really mean a lot to me.

JAY

No, no I am patient. And I'm
grateful you like got me the gig.

A pause. Jay takes out his phone, checks the time.

JAY (CONT'D)

I promised myself I'd finish that
rewrite of the second act. Oscar
gave me some notes--

CARSON

(teasing)

Oh, Oscar has some notes for you. I
didn't realize *Oscar the Great and*
Powerful had notes on *your* play.

JAY

(unserious)

Shut up.

CARSON

Is that pressing?

JAY

Uh... yeah, kind of? I mean they're
holding the April slot for me, but
it's conditionally accepted...

CARSON

But it's not a done deal?

JAY

Oscar wants to see a new draft
before he'll give the *official* go-
ahead. But with changes and *you*
playing the lead...

Jay gets up and goes over to the minibar. Starts perusing.

CARSON

Did you take my note about that
opening scene?

JAY

Kind of.

CARSON

Does he still kill the dog?

JAY

...yeah.

CARSON

Then you didn't take my note.

JAY

I guess I didn't.

CARSON

I read somewhere that if a character kills a dog there's nothing he can ever do to redeem himself in the audience's eyes. Like he could be... John Lennon, but if he kills a dog in Act One, it doesn't matter that he'll go on to write "Imagine" in Act Two.

JAY

Plays are different. The audience is more sophisticated than the average Marvel junkie or Netflix zombie. I don't want to pander for the sake of likability.

Jay keeps searching through the minibar.

CARSON

How sophisticated are a bunch of tourists that pay two hundred dollars a ticket to watch a human dressed as a cat sing *Memories*?

JAY

(joking)

Okay. Wow. How dare you compare my play to *Cats*.

CARSON

(laughs)

No, I wasn't--

JAY

I'm talking about the Downtown theater crowd. La Mama, the Public. C'mon, you know what I meant, don't pretend to be stupid for the sake of winning an argument.

CARSON

Please don't call me stupid.

JAY

I didn't call you stupid, I asked you to stop *pretending* to be stupid.

(MORE)

JAY (CONT'D)

(beat)

So it's actually like the opposite
of calling you stupid.

(pause, further clarifying)

I am saying you're too smart to be
behaving as stupidly as you are.

CARSON

Yeah, thanks, I got it.

(a cleansing breath)

You know how much I love your play.
I'm just worried if you lose your
audience in the first five minutes,
you're going to spend the rest of
the time trying to get them back.
You're such a talented writer, I
don't want people to be off-put.

JAY

Why was John Lennon your reference
point for a good person?

CARSON

Was he not a good person?

JAY

He was a bit pretentious. And a
terrible father.

CARSON

He was?

JAY

I think that's universally known.

CARSON

Which part?

JAY

(thinks, then)

Both.

Carson returns to her phone, lazily. There's something on
Jay's mind. He's on the verge of saying it. Finally:

JAY (CONT'D)

Why did you say I was such a good
writer?

CARSON

What?

JAY

Why did you say I was such a good writer?

CARSON

Should I not compliment you on your--

JAY

No. You said I was such a good writer. Emphasis on writer. Like as opposed to actor.

CARSON

Um... I think you're kinda projecting or something because--

JAY

No, don't-- don't psychoanalyze me to get yourself off the hook. If you weren't trying to-- if you were just complimenting my writing you would have emphasized *such*. You're *such* a good writer. But you emphasized writer. You're such a good writer. As opposed to actor.

CARSON

But I didn't say that!

JAY

(trying to keep it light)
The emphasis implied it.

CARSON

Jay, if I didn't think you were a good actor, why would I get you this part?

JAY

I had to convince you.

CARSON

Well, I was easily won over.

Carson tries to illicit a smile. But Jay doesn't.

CARSON (CONT'D)

I honestly didn't even really think you were interested in acting. Your identity revolves around writer to--

JAY

I just thought it would be--

CARSON

I really didn't mean to make you--

JAY

It's fine. Sorry. Thank you. I'm just nervous. I'm not the most confident actor, and this whole meeting makes me uncomfortable. I'm not trying to pick a fight. Sorry.

CARSON

(softening)

I understand. But this will be quick. It's *us*.

Jay nods, feeling a bit more at ease.

MARCELLO (PRE-LAP)

CUT!

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

MARCELLO, 29, passionate, self-proclaimed "wunderkind" who's out of touch with emotion, deep down a decent human being who hides his shallow grasp of the craft with intellectual prattle. He rushes out from behind VIDEO VILLAGE.

He approaches the filming area, where an ACTOR playing a BELLHOP and a YOUNG WOMAN await their directions.

MARCELLO

I liked it. I liked it a lot. But I didn't love it.

The Bellhop nods dutifully while the Woman looks annoyed. Marcello is approached by his ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (40s, officious, stressed out).

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Can we move on, Marcello? We're into meal penalty.

MARCELLO

Let me explain something to you, Jon. Bresson would regularly do over fifty takes and the reason is, once you exhaust the actors, you push past their artifice and get to something authentic. I understand you're concerned with the schedule, and that's your job. I'm not--

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Marcello. We need. To move. On.
Takes five through fifteen have
looked exactly the same.

MARCELLO
Seemingly. Seemingly. But--

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
We're calling lunch.

MARCELLO
We'll call lunch just as soon as
I'm satisfied.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Okay. Then you can speak to Nelson and explain why this day is going to cost him significantly more than we've budgeted.

Marcello nods, chastened.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CONT'D) MARCELLO
That's lunch! Okay, lunch! Thank you, everyone!

PAs echo the AD's call for lunch. The crew begins to move on.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Jay is back to rummaging in the minibar.

JAY
They got a range of those little bottles of alcohol, chocolate chip cookies, sun chips, peanuts...

CARSON

Jay stops rifling through the minibar.

JAY
Are you sure that's a good idea?

CARSON
I don't have scenes today.

JAY
But you're still work-- at work.
We're having this meeting. About
work. It's a work meeting.

CARSON
A little gin won't kill me.

JAY
They don't have gin.

CARSON
(getting up)
Let me see.

JAY
What, you don't trust me? They
don't have gin.

Carson approaches the minibar. Jay tries to block her.

CARSON
Stop!

JAY
I just don't think it's a good idea!

Jay thrusts his entire body against the minibar, while Carson tries to rip him away. They struggle.

CARSON
What are you doing!?

JAY
I'm trying to help you!

They look at each other. Then burst out laughing at how absurd this is.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

CLOSE on Marcello. His brow furrowed, trying to decide something. Finally:

MARCELLO
What kind of sick?

REVERSE to reveal HERMAN, late 30s, eager with a slight desperation, holding the hand of his obviously SICK CHILD, 6 years old, feverish, his nose running.

Marcello is sitting at his director's chair in video village.

HERMAN
I'm telling you he's fine. He can work, no problem. Tell him, David.

DAVID
(stuffed up)
I'm okay.

MARCELLO
...right. He *seems* sick though.

Marcello goes to put his hand on the child's forehead, but grossed out, thinks better of it. A PROPS PA approaches.

PROPS PA
Sorry... I was told I have to move
video village.

MARCELLO
Of course.

They look at each other.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)
Oh, you need my chair.

Marcello stands, gathers his things in the side pocket and stuffs them into a leather messenger bag that he puts around his shoulder.

PROPS PA
Thank you, sorry.

The Props PA folds the directors chair and carries it off. Marcello stands, out of place, returns to his conversation.

HERMAN
He's under the weather.

MARCELLO
Doesn't that... that's just a
euphemism for sick.

HERMAN
He can do the scene. He's been
practicing in the mirror for a
week. We hired him a friggin'
acting coach!

MARCELLO
Well, who told you to a hire an
acting coach?! I didn't tell you to
hire an acting coach.

HERMAN
It would break his little heart if
you just pull the plug on him. Do
you want to break my kid's heart?

DAVID
(to his dad)
Can we go soon?

MARCELLO
Obviously this puts me in a
terrible position because his scene
is first up after lunch and he's
already been established...

HERMAN
I'm not putting you in *any*
position, pal, I'm telling you,
we're good to go.

David sneezes into his hands. Marcello watches David wipe his snot on his father's pants.

MARCELLO
Yeah... just post covid, people can
be... intense about this kind of
thing. And I don't wanna raise any
flags, but, this isn't technically
allowed.

(thinks, then)
Alright, fine, let's do it. We'll
get him into costume, shoot his
coverage first and get him outta
here. Just... keep his whole "under
the weather" thing between us and
we'll be fine. Okay?

HERMAN
You got it! Thank you. You'll see,
he's gonna nail it.
(to David)
C'mon, buddy, let's get you
something from crafty.

As they walk off:

DAVID
Can Mom come next time?

Marcello's assistant, SUSANNAH, 25, capable and non-imposing, approaches Marcello. She's been waiting off to the side for the right moment to approach.

SUSANNAH
(serious tone)
Hey...

MARCELLO
What's up, Susannah?

SUSANNAH
It's starting to get some traction.

MARCELLO
What is?

SUSANNAH
About the-- your short film.

MARCELLO
The...

SUSANNAH
Your student film? Someone dug it up on Vimeo and--

MARCELLO
Oh, that's-- Yeah, you--

SUSANNAH
I mentioned it, but it wasn't-- it was just a few tweets, but--

MARCELLO
When you say, traction--

SUSANNAH
It was retweeted by some accounts--

MARCELLO
(getting concerned)
What accounts? Who?

SUSANNAH
A Buzzfeed person. Ella something?
And some actors.

MARCELLO
Actors that I--

SUSANNAH
I'm not sure if you know them or they just saw the short and--

MARCELLO
Actors... or movie stars?

SUSANNAH
Um... is there a like specific--

MARCELLO
But it was a metaphor. Like, people understand that right?

SUSANNAH

Yeah... I don't think people are like picking up on the metaphorical aspect of the-- Wait, which exactly... is the metaphorical part?

MARCELLO

Is it universally maligned? There must be *some* people who like it. Or maybe not *like* it, but at least understand what I was going for.

SUSANNAH

There's some backlash to the backlash. But it's more on the "artistic expression free speech angle"?

MARCELLO

Well that's... something.

SUSANNAH

Yeah... I would still take it off your Vimeo if you can.

MARCELLO

It's not even my account! It's... I don't know who uploaded it.

SUSANNAH

Oh okay.

MARCELLO

Can you see about taking it down? Flag it for offensive content if you have to, just get it offline. As soon as possible, Susannah, thank you.

SUSANNAH

Okay. Of course.

A weird pause. Marcello is trying to remain calm.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)

Also... this is kind of awkward, but did you happen to send my script to your friend at--

MARCELLO

Oh yes! No I did not... do that yet. But I will. I certainly will.

SUSANNAH

Amazing. I don't mean to be weird.

MARCELLO

(kindly)

You're not being weird, Susannah. I want to help you. You're talented.

SUSANNAH

(smiling)

Thanks. That means a lot.

(pause)

Do you want me to bring you something from catering?

MARCELLO

Oh, no thank you! I'm just going to stay here I think, go over the shots with Rodrigo.

SUSANNAH

Oh okay, because you have that intimacy meeting... upstairs?

MARCELLO

Shit... that's today? Could they do it without me? Just the actors and--

SUSANNAH

Legally? No, I think... you definitely have to be there the whole time, they won't do it without you.

MARCELLO

Fine. Is the new intimacy coordinator here? What's her name?

SUSANNAH

Perla. Yeah not yet, but she'll be here really soon.

MARCELLO

We'll have to make it very quick. What's the room number?

Susannah scrolls through emails on her phone, checking.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - TIME CUT

Marcello bursts in through the door to greet Carson and Jay.

MARCELLO

Good morning! Or whatever the hell greeting is appropriate for this time of day.

(MORE)

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

I apologize, the night shoots last week still have my brain scrambled like an egg. Hello!

CARSON

Hi!

MARCELLO

I spoke to Damian, he's thrilled with the dailies.

CARSON

Amazing!

MARCELLO

I wonder if you might want to join me in the editing bay sometime, Carson.

CARSON

Oh... I'd-- I don't know, I might be too self-conscious. It's hard for me to watch myself.

MARCELLO

Well, that's your prerogative. But I think it could be helpful, especially for young actors.

CARSON

I'll think about it.

Jay watches this, a little suspiciously. It isn't exactly flirtatious, but he still feels a bit weird about it.

JAY

Hi.

MARCELLO

Hello! Marcello. So good to finally meet...

JAY (CONT'D)

Good to see you aga-- Nice to meet you... It's Jay.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

(a confused pause)

Oh yes. Of course. Was it... we've met at the, uh--

JAY

At Sundance last year. Carson and I saw your movie, we talked after the--

CARSON

You remember Jay, Marcello. I introduced him to you at--

MARCELLO

(to Jay)

Of course! You were dressed as a tomato. Or... you wore a ketchup suit.

JAY

It was... it was just a red suit, that's all. What's a ketchup suit? It wasn't designed by Heinz or something.

MARCELLO

No. Right. Sorry. That whole time was a whirlwind for me, as I'm sure you can imagine, with the bidding war and everything.

Carson squeezes Jay's hand as if to say: *Calm down*. Marcello sits down in one of the chairs. Motions for Jay and Carson to sit on the couch. They do so. An awkward pause.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

Thank you both for meeting us here. We're shooting down in the lobby and this is the only place we could get some privacy.

CARSON

JAY

It's great! We're happy to. Totally cool.

MARCELLO

Are you two hungry? We can get a PA to go over to catering and pick something up?

CARSON

JAY

We're fine. No thanks.

MARCELLO

There's some really good restaurants around here too. Canter's I think is... or sushi?

JAY

We're good.

MARCELLO

I know this is a little weird to do...

(MORE)

MARCELLO (CONT'D)
for obvious reasons, but we have to
follow procedure. Regardless. You
get it?

JAY CARSON
Yup. Totally.

Marcello looks at both of them, bobbing his head.

JAY (CONT'D)
So are we going to be naked--

MARCELLO
I actually think we're supposed to
wait for the intimacy coordinator.

JAY MARCELLO (CONT'D)
Oh. Legally speaking.

JAY (CONT'D)
Is this a legal issue?

MARCELLO
Well not legal, it's--

CARSON
I think it's more about making sure
everyone's comfortable with what's
happen-- what's going to happen.

MARCELLO
Yeah, sure. Perla should be here
any minute. She's hit some traffic.

CARSON
Perla...

MARCELLO
The intimacy coordinator.

JAY
I thought you said the intimacy
coordinator... wasn't it Skylar?

CARSON
It was Skylar, but she...
(to Marcello)
What happened to Skylar?

MARCELLO
Skylar... had a medical emergency
so she was replaced. By Perla.

CARSON

Oh god. Is she okay?

MARCELLO

Yeah, she's fine. Well. She's not
really fine, but... it's fine.

CARSON

What happened to her?

MARCELLO

(off-handedly)

She went blind.

A shocked silence.

JAY

Wait what? Just like, inexplicably?

MARCELLO

I'm not in the details on it.

(a weird pause)

We're really lucky to have Perla
though. She's coming back from a
shoot in Chatsworth. I probably
shouldn't say this, but it's for
the new Yellowstone spinoff.

CARSON

Oh! Another one?

JAY

So this woman, this Skylar, she's
just like... blind now?

A silence as everyone absorbs this.

MARCELLO

She also did the last season of
that James Spader NBC show.

JAY

Skylar?

MARCELLO

No, the new one, Perla.

JAY

That show is *still on*? Who's
watching that?

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

I think it's cancelled.

CARSON

(to Marcello)

Is there a big need for an intimacy coordinator on that show?

MARCELLO

You'd be surprised. Did you see any of Season 10?

CARSON

No...

MARCELLO

Well James Spader fucks half the FBI Task Force.

CARSON

Wow.

MARCELLO

Of course it's network, so you know it isn't graphic. But it's suggestive. He licks his lips a lot.

JAY

You need an intimacy coordinator for licking your own lips?

MARCELLO

No, you need one for all the fucking he does.

JAY

Got it.

MARCELLO

NBC is really pushing boundaries this season, you'd be surprised.

JAY

That is surprising.

MARCELLO

And Spader's gone back to Sex, Lies and Videotape level of freaky.

JAY

I think he peaked in Boston Legal.

CARSON

I didn't know you watched Boston Legal, that's so cute.

JAY
(a little defensive)
Not all of it, just enough to get a
sense. I'm not like some closeted
Boston Legal fan.

MARCELLO
It's a bit before my time.

JAY
I'm, what, like eight years older
than you.

MARCELLO
(skeptical)
Yeah... sure?

JAY
We're *contemporaries* okay?

MARCELLO
Boston Legal was just not in my
generation's *zeitgeist*.

JAY
You may not be aware of a TV show,
but that doesn't mean it's before
your time. Boston Legal was a big
deal in *our* early twenties.

MARCELLO
I was at AFI in *my* early twenties.

JAY
What is that-- MARCELLO (CONT'D)
American Film Institute--

JAY (CONT'D)
I know what AFI is.

MARCELLO
I was getting my masters in
directing. So my consumption at the
time was mostly *cinematic* in
nature. David Lynch... uh, and
such. I wasn't watching network
television.

CARSON
Oh, I love Lynch! JAY
You know, David Lynch *did*
network television.

MARCELLO

But you understand. In school, you study the classics. I'm sure it was the same for you at...

JAY

Iowa Writers' Workshop.

(beat)

I didn't go, but... I got in.

A weird pause. Carson's embarrassed. We focus on her reactions throughout, sometimes inscrutable, other times calculating, like she's doing a series of equations in her head.

JAY (CONT'D)

I couldn't afford it at the time, and I thought it would be better to put any money I did have into producing my own plays. In New York. My first one-act was pretty well received actually--

MARCELLO

Perla should be here soon.

JAY

I got a flattering mention in the Times. They called me a vanguard.

CARSON

Should we call her maybe?

JAY (CONT'D)

Of course the thing with being a vanguard is they're rarely appreciated in their own times.

MARCELLO

I'm sure she'll be here any minute.

An awkward pause. Everyone is waiting for the other to speak.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

Have you ever worked in film?

JAY

Well, television. After there was some buzz about a play of mine in New York, I got an agent and then I got staffed.

MARCELLO

On what?

JAY
(slightly chagrinned)
It was called... uh, John from
Cincinnati?

MARCELLO
Oh... I'm not familiar.

JAY
It only lasted a season. It was on
HBO, the Deadwood guy, David Milch,
so I thought it was going to be a
big deal. But it wasn't. I don't
think David liked me very much. He
kept a gun in his desk. He never
threatened me with it, but I found
it unsettling. I used to have
nightmares where he'd pull it out
and show it to me. When I would
pitch something he didn't like.

(beat, he thinks, then)
It was still cool to work with him
though.

Marcello nods, looking like he is holding back from saying
something. Jay notices.

JAY (CONT'D)
What?

MARCELLO
No, nothing.

JAY
It's okay... you can, I can tell
you have an opinion.

MARCELLO
It just sounds like... it sounds
like the dream is about your penis.

JAY
(taken aback)
Excuse me?

MARCELLO
Or... well, David Milch's penis
maybe. He whips out his...

MARCELLO (CONT'D) JAY
(using air quotes)
"gun" whenever you pitch
something bad... Why are you using air quotes?
It was literally a gun.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

Yes well... I'm just saying the gun
probably symbolizes his penis. I
don't think I'm out on a limb here.

Marcello looks to Carson for support. Carson is trying to
stifle her laughter. Jay turns to her, irked.

CARSON

I think Marcello's just razzing
you, Jay. It took me a while to get
used to his sense of humor, but--

MARCELLO

Did it? I-- Wait...

CARSON

Maybe we should change the subject.

MARCELLO

(awkward pause)

So how did you two meet?

Jay rolls his eyes.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

Have I made a faux-pas?

JAY

No, I just hate that question.

MARCELLO

I suppose most people meet on an
app these days, which doesn't make
for the most scintillating--

CARSON

We actually met the old-fashioned
way. IRL, human contact, all that.

JAY

In New York. I saw her in a
production of A Doll's House at
Barrow Street.

CARSON

I wasn't Nora or anything. I just
played a maid.

JAY

She was electric on stage. You
couldn't take your eyes off her.

CARSON
(smiles)
Maybe you couldn't.

JAY
I introduced myself after the show.
We went for coffee at one of those
twenty-four hour diners, and we
talked like all night.

CARSON
Jay was so knowledgeable about
theater and art and... I think I
fell for him instantly.

JAY
I was nervous for you to see my
play.

CARSON
Oh my god, that's-- JAY (CONT'D)
Just if you didn't like it--

CARSON (CONT'D)
But I knew I'd love it. The-- Wait,
where was it--

JAY
It was at Playwrights-- CARSON (CONT'D)
Playwrights Horizons! Right.
God, that might be my
favorite production you've
ever had.

JAY (CONT'D)
Mine too. Matthew Maher just-- CARSON (CONT'D)
God, what a master. I love him! He really gets
your dialogue.

JAY (CONT'D)
I want him for the new one at the
Public, but I'm not sure--

CARSON
Oh you should!

JAY
You two would be great together.

Carson almost replies, but she stops herself for some reason.

MARCELLO
That's a wonderful story. I don't
know why you dislike recounting it.

Jay smiles at Carson warmly.

CARSON

We moved in together within six months of meeting. My friends thought I was crazy.

JAY

They always hated me.

CARSON

They just didn't know you. And you never gave them a chance to.

JAY

I miss our lives in New York. We had this sweet little apartment in Cobble Hill.

CARSON

It was a shoebox and cost a fortune.

MARCELLO

You dislike Los Angeles?

JAY

It's okay. I grew up in Manhattan, so that will always be home to me.

Marcello gets a CALL. His ringtone is "Il Triello" by Ennio Morricone. He checks his phone.

MARCELLO

Sorry, it's my agent.

CARSON

No problem.

JAY

Where are you reped?

MARCELLO

(answering the call)

Hey, Larry! How are things over at the Beverly Hills palace?

Marcello listens intently, and his smile quickly vanishes. Carson and Jay exchange a look. We FOLLOW HIM as he stands and retreats to a more discrete corner of the room. He speaks in a hushed, anxious tone.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

Comment for what?

INT. SLEEK OFFICE - GERSH AGENCY - DAY

LARRY FINKELSTEIN, 60s, a veteran agent who's weathered his fair share of shitstorms, eats an overpriced salad at his desk with a wireless telephone headset on. He has an easygoing, avuncular nature. We INTERCUT between them:

LARRY
(mouth full)
So far... Hollywood Reporter.

MARCELLO
Fuck.

LARRY
It's not the Times. Could be worse.

MARCELLO
Well it could be better! I don't want to talk to whatever *hack* is writing this *nothing* story.

LARRY
Vice thinks you're being misinterpreted. Caught up in the "swirl of liberal groupthink." That's a quote. So... you know, it's not all bad.

MARCELLO
Well that's something. Vice?

LARRY
Or maybe it was Breitbart.

MARCELLO
(horrified)
What??

LARRY
Kidding!

MARCELLO
Y'know, Larry, you're supposed to protect me from shit like this.

LARRY
I'm *trying* to protect you, but who am I, Stalin? I can't control who publishes what. What we *can* do now, is control the narrative.

MARCELLO

What narrative? There is no narrative.

LARRY

The narrative is in the process of being formed. So let's get our voice in the mix so we can shape things.

MARCELLO

LARRY (CONT'D)

Alright, I guess if that's what you think is best, I-- I watched the short film.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

You did?

LARRY

Well... no. But my assistant did, and he summarized it for me.

MARCELLO

Larry, you know me. I don't have a problem with...

LARRY

With...?

MARCELLO

You know...

LARRY

...Jews?

MARCELLO

You're my agent for christ's sake! Would I have you for an agent if I had a problem with...

LARRY

Jews.

MARCELLO

I mean, it was a metaphor. You got that it was a metaphor, right?

LARRY

A metaphor for what?

Marcello thinks for a beat, unsure exactly what to say.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I'm going to have Andrew draft something.

MARCELLO

Who the fuck is Andrew?

LARRY

My assistant. Very capable kid. He went to Dartmouth with my son, Isaac, you remember him. Speaking of which, did I tell you he just got into med school?

MARCELLO

Well then why is he your assistant?

LARRY

Not Andrew. Isaac, my youngest. He wants to be a urologist. I said at least you're following in my footsteps because all day long, all I do is take meetings with pricks.

MARCELLO

Is that an attempt at humor?

LARRY

Task at hand, I just wanted to check in with you about whether you wanted Andrew to include anything--

MARCELLO

No offense, but I don't want some Ivy League babyfuck to draft anything!

LARRY

(awkward pause)

Andrew's on this call...

MARCELLO

(winces)

Hi, Andrew.

LARRY

(pause, good-natured)

Don't worry, Andrew's a Hollywood assistant, he's used to abuse.

MARCELLO

I was twenty five years old when I made the short! I was practically a child! You can't hold me accountable for something I did four years ago!

LARRY

...I don't think we should include
that in the statement.

MARCELLO

No, I was just saying.

LARRY

Chin up! You haven't made it in
this town unless you've been
accused of *something*. Antisemitism?
Could be worse.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Marcello ends the call and pockets his phone. He returns to Jay and Carson, who are now standing and look concerned.

MARCELLO

Sorry about that.

CARSON

Is everything okay?

MARCELLO

Absolutely. Should we-- we can
start with any questions?

JAY

I have a question. And I don't mean
this in a like... judgmental or...
whatever way. I'm genuinely asking.
Why do we need to do this? Carson
and I have been married for two
years. And we dated for three years
before that. We literally had sex
this morning--

CARSON

Oh my god, seriously Jay?
(embarrassed, to Marcello)
I'm sorry.

MARCELLO

No, no, it's okay... I know this is
a bit odd, and far be it from me to
tell you how to have sex with your
wife. That's not why we're here.

JAY

(ironic)

Oh good.

MARCELLO

And Perla is not going to tell you how to have sex with your wife. But the reality is, this flashback is integral to the denouement of the story, and it needs to feel authentic. I want it to look like cinéma vérité by way of Lars Von Trier. Tasteful.

JAY

Wow.

MARCELLO

What?

JAY

No, I just never thought I'd hear the words "Lars Von Trier" and "tasteful" in the same sentence.

MARCELLO

I don't want to misrepresent the scene. We still need to show some skin to keep the suits off our backs.

JAY

(to Carson)

Wait, you didn't say anything about nudity--

MARCELLO

God, no. Her, not you. The point is to keep the audience in their seats, not have them darting for the fire exits.

JAY

I realize that, I was talking about my wife.

MARCELLO

We're not here to discuss the economics of film. We're here to discuss the boundaries of what each of you are comfortable with in advance, now, so that when we shoot this tomorrow, those boundaries won't be crossed.

JAY

Look I'm not against--

MARCELLO

Intimacy coordinators make actors feel more safe. Particularly actresses, and I'm surprised given your wife is an actress, you would be so dismissive of the practice.

JAY

I'm not-- Look, I get that. And I'm an actor too, obviously.

A weird pause. Is he really?

JAY (CONT'D)

Well perhaps not at the calibre of my wife, but I understand the practice. It's just for this particular circumstance... it feels weird.

(to Carson)

Doesn't it feel weird to you?

Before she can answer, Marcello jumps in.

MARCELLO

I'm just saying that it's a practice that makes women feel safer. So you might not want to rush to repudiate it.

CARSON

I think it makes *all* actors feel safer.

MARCELLO

Well... sure.

PERLA, 32, soft-spoken, crunchy-granola hippy vibe, but more on her mind than one would first assume, bursts through the hotel room door. She immediately owns the space.

PERLA

Sorry I'm late, but there was a bit of a problem on set and I had to crack some heads.

She laughs oddly. Then suddenly very serious:

PERLA (CONT'D)

I'm kidding. I would never resort to violence. Physical or spiritual.

Perla tosses her bag into the corner and stands in the center of the room looking around at everyone.

PERLA (CONT'D)
(to Jay)
Hi, there.

JAY
H-hi.

PERLA
(unblinking)
I need water.

Jay is unsure if Perla is asking him for water.

JAY
Oh, there's... I think there are
little Dasani bottles in the...

PERLA
No thank you. I have my Nalgene.

Perla retrieves her Nalgene. Chugs half of it.

PERLA (CONT'D)
You know... Dasani water has salt.

JAY
In the water?

PERLA
Read the ingredients. It's so you
buy more of it... and it never
quenches your thirst. Even water,
the most essential element to
natural life, has become corrupted
under capitalism.

MARCELLO
I was just telling Carson and Jay--

JAY
I'm Jay.

PERLA
Jay, I'm so sorry. I don't even
know you're name, and I'm already
lecturing you on capitalist
exploitation.

JAY
Oh no... problem. I went to Bard
so... y'know, I'm used to it.

CARSON
No you didn't.

JAY

I did a summer program there.

PERLA

And Carson. I've been wanting to
meet you for a very long time.

Perla approaches Carson. Makes intense unbroken eye contact
with her while she shakes Carson's hand warmly.

CARSON

Oh, I'm flattered!

PERLA

It is so special to meet you.
(without looking at Jay)
Both of you.

JAY

Thank you, so are you.

PERLA

(weird pause)

You...

JAY

Oh, I thought you said.. Sorry. I
guess I'm a little anxious.

PERLA

That's totally understandable.
Doing intimate scenes can make even
the sturdiest of us a little wibbly-
wobbly. But we're going to discuss
and choreograph everything. And
there are exercises I'd like to
begin with, which I think will help
us get into it. How's that sound?

MARCELLO

Oh... I thought this was just going
to be a discussion. I don't know if
we have time to choreograph.

PERLA

I think we need to get into our
bodies and make choices.

MARCELLO

We can figure that out on the day?

PERLA

If we were doing a fight sequence, you
would rehearse that, wouldn't you?

MARCELLO

I-- Of course. Let's get into it.

PERLA

Fab.

Marcello settles in. Perla takes off her shoes and socks.

CARSON

Oh.

PERLA

Everything okay?

CARSON

No, yeah, of course. I just... have
a bit of a foot thing.

(a confused pause)

I have an aversion... to the foot.

PERLA

Would it make you more comfortable
if I put my socks back on?

CARSON

It would. Sorry if I'm being a
psycho.

PERLA

(putting them back on)

Perfectly alright.

JAY

Don't take it personally. She makes
me wear slippers around the house.
If she finds my feet repulsive...

CARSON

Not *repulsive*, I'd just rather not
see them if I can avoid it.

PERLA

I'm sorry. You two are... together?

JAY

We're married. Did you not know
that?

PERLA

No... I didn't.

CARSON

Sorry if that... throws things off.

PERLA

No, it's perfectly fine. I'm just
an eensie-weensie bit surprised.

JAY

(pre-offended)

Why are you surprised?

PERLA

No reason. I'll have to adjust my
approach, but the basic tenants are
intact. I am water, I flow.

She smiles at them and proceeds to push the CHAIRS out of the way and moves the table against the wall in order to clear more space. She sits cross-legged on the floor.

PERLA (CONT'D)

Can everyone join me in the circle?

Carson immediately joins Perla. Jay reluctantly follows suit. Marcello isn't sure whether or not he's supposed to join.

PERLA (CONT'D)

Everyone...

Marcello sits down, closing out the circle.

PERLA (CONT'D)

Okay... Now, if it's okay with you, Marcello, I like to begin by just speaking the words of the scene. No acting. Let's focus on making contact. It's good to get a baseline before diving into the intimate parts.

JAY

I'm not quite off book.

Carson is slightly annoyed. Jay senses this.

JAY (CONT'D)

I'm basically there, but I can-- I might just glance down at the script occasionally.

Jay pulls out his phone and searches for the PDF. Everyone watches him. He finally finds it and pulls it up.

JAY (CONT'D)

Okay, got it.

PERLA

Lovely. Let's begin. Whenever
you're ready.

Jay scrolls on his phone. Then looks up at Carson.

CARSON

It's you.

JAY

Oh... sorry.

Jay looks back down at his phone. He starts "acting" while Carson remains very natural. Marcello watches this all impatiently.

JAY (CONT'D)

I don't know what you want me to
say.

CARSON

If you didn't love me, I wish you
had just told me that.

JAY

But that's not how I felt. It--

CARSON

I'm sorry, can we stop?

PERLA

What's up?

CARSON

It's just that... you said like no
acting, just say the words, right?
But like... I can feel Jay "acting"
right now. This isn't how he
normally acts-- or behaves I mean.
And I feel held at arm's length.

PERLA

Okay...

Jay looks at her surprised and feeling a bit betrayed.

CARSON

I'm sorry, I'm just being honest
and I don't think this'll work
unless we're truthful.

PERLA

Jay, do you understand where
Carson's coming from?

Jay nods, peeved.

PERLA (CONT'D)
Do we want to try this again?

CARSON JAY
I'd like to. Yup.

Marcello interjects, trying to course-correct.

MARCELLO
I'm sorry. I just-- We're on a pretty tight thirty before I have to be back on set so I'm just... I wasn't prepared for this to be such an elaborate affair.

PERLA
What exactly did you expect?

MARCELLO
I thought we would chat, name some do's and don't's and be on our merry way... to speak candidly.

PERLA
(disappointed)
I understand.

MARCELLO
I can... I can text Jon and see if we-- Rodrigo will probably need some time to light anyway. We'll do an hour for lunch and that should be enough time. Right?

PERLA
Absolutely!

Marcello whips out his phone and starts texting. Jay isn't sure whether he's supposed to wait for Marcello to be done or start. He decides to wait. Perla turns to Jay and Carson.

PERLA (CONT'D)
Whenever you're ready.

Carson smiles and nods encouragingly to Jay. Jay glances back down at his phone. He is more natural this time around.

JAY
I don't know what you want me to say.

CARSON

If you didn't love me, I wish you
had just told me that.

JAY

But that's not how I felt. It
wasn't that.

CARSON

Then what was it?

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

PERLA

Sorry to interrupt. Carson, why
don't you tell Jay to repeat his
line if it doesn't land with you.
Sound good? Let's pick it back up.

CARSON

Then what was it?

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

CARSON

Repeat.

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

CARSON

Repeat.

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

CARSON

Repeat.

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

CARSON

Repeat.

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

CARSON

Repeat.

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

CARSON

Repeat.

JAY

It was something broken inside of me.

CARSON

Repeat.

Jay stares daggers at Carson. He stands up, breaking the circle, and turns away from her. She stands and goes towards him, placing her hand on his shoulder comfortingly.

CARSON (CONT'D)

I'm not trying to upset you...

JAY

It's starting to feel personal.

CARSON

I'm just responding honestly.

JAY

To what?

CARSON

What you're putting out there. I'm just... doing my job.

JAY

Maybe I'm not responding honestly because the writing is shitty.

MARCELLO

(defensive)

Okay, I think we're all saying things we don't mean right now.

Jay and Carson turn back towards Marcello.

JAY

Are we?

PERLA

Why don't we put a pause on this exercise. It's something I find usually grounds and connects scene partners but since-- Well, let's just move on for the moment.

A KNOCK at the door. Everyone looks over.

MARCELLO

Yes?

The door opens to reveal Susannah.

SUSANNAH

Hi, sorry to interrupt.

She peers around looking for Marcello. Sees Jay and suddenly becomes flushed.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)

Hey, I...

JAY

Do we know each other?

SUSANNAH

No, I-- I'm actually just an admirer of your-- I read "All Conquers Love" in my sophomore playwriting class. It was kind of a revelation for me. Sorry if that's weird.

JAY

(surprised and pleased)
Oh my god, not at all, that's incredibly nice of you to say.
Sorry, this just... I'm kinda shocked you've read my play.

SUSANNAH

Just the one... it's so uncompromising in its bleakness... I'm gushing, I apologize--

JAY

Gush away. Actually... do you wanna be my agent?

Susannah laughs. Carson squeezes Jay's shoulder supportively. He smiles at Carson like "Can you believe this?" Marcello looks annoyed.

MARCELLO

Sorry, Susannah, did you need something?

SUSANNAH

Oh, yeah, I--

She motions to Marcello to join him for a private word. He approaches her and they go to the more secluded entryway.

MARCELLO

Do they need me on set? This is taking longer than I--

SUSANNAH

Oh, yeah, they-- Well, I think Rodrigo and some others were like wondering if you'd be down for blocking soon, so they can light.

MARCELLO

I'll be down as soon as I can. They can start lighting.

SUSANNAH

Oh okay. I think-- last time the actors got like kinda mad that you lit the scene a certain way before they blocked it because--

MARCELLO

It's fine, Susannah. It's-- Sorry, we're just under the gun here. All hands on deck, yes?

SUSANNAH

No, sure. Okay.
(beat)

Also Jon hasn't been able to find David, the kid playing--

MARCELLO

What? Where's his dad?

SUSANNAH

Also MIA. And someone from clearances screamed at me? Because you didn't change the reference to--

MARCELLO

Who screamed at you?

SUSANNAH

Patrick something? He screamed. A lot. So... there's that. But also, I've gotten a bunch of emails from different... about the short film?

MARCELLO

What emails? From whom?

SUSANNAH

Deadline, Variety, The Times--

MARCELLO
LA or New York?

SUSANNAH
I think... both?

MARCELLO
(hushed voice, agitated)
Since when did this become a...
thing!? For fuck's sake, no one
watches short films anyway. It was
just practice, it wasn't even...
real. It's nothing.

SUSANNAH
There's also... The Anti-Defamation
League tweeted about it.

MARCELLO
What did they say??

Susannah pulls out her phone and starts scrolling.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)
Never mind, I don't wanna know.
I'll-- I'll deal with this later.
Can we... Just tell everyone I'll
be down as soon as I can.

SUSANNAH
Okay. Can I give them an ETA?

MARCELLO
Just... as soon as I can. Okay?

SUSANNAH
So... ten minutes?

Marcello looks at her, exasperated.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
Just trying to gauge your
definition of "soon" but all good.

Susannah heads out the way she came.

PERLA
Can we... join us, Marcello? We're
trying to establish a consistent
circle of energy and it's difficult
when that energy is interrupted.

MARCELLO
(rejoining)
Yep. I'm here.

PERLA
Lovely. Why don't we establish some boundaries in the scene. Okay?

Carson and Jay nod. Carson sits down on the bed. So does Jay. Perla paces near them while Marcello watches from the sidelines against the wall.

PERLA (CONT'D)
Let's start with what I call our traffic lights. These are our green zones, our yellow zones and our red zones. I think you can both guess where I'm going with this.

CARSON
A yellow zone...

PERLA
Basically with whatever we're doing with our scene partner... touching, kissing, etcetera... we'll designate places and things that are yes's, no's, and the yellow zones, I'm glad you asked this, Carson, those are things you can say: I don't know. And if you don't know, those things will remain red until you give me a green.

Perla searches in her bag and takes out crinkled script pages. There are her hand written notes in the margins.

PERLA (CONT'D)
We have... the first point of contact is a kiss. So how do we feel about that?

CARSON
Well, I'm crying and he's comforting me... I think it starts off gentle and then it becomes passionate and then it... heats up.

PERLA
Okay. So when we say, passionate or heats up, we mean...?

JAY
Tongue?

PERLA

(laughs)

Well... that makes sense. Is that a green light for both of you?

They nod and look at each other. Maybe a little smile between them. Tension melting a bit.

PERLA (CONT'D)

Fab. So while you're kissing, let's establish some green zones for your hands. Hands on hips?

(Jay and Carson nod)

Neck?

(they nod)

Shoulders?

(they nod)

Any red zones with hands while kissing?

(they shake their heads)

We can also keep it to those green zone areas and you have those options to play with in the scene.

CARSON

JAY

That sounds great.

Sure.

PERLA

Jay, you push Carson onto the bed. So, Carson, where should he push you? What feels right?

CARSON

I don't think of it quite as a push. I think he can put his hand on my shoulder and I can kind of fall back onto the bed.

JAY

Works for me.

PERLA

So Carson stays in control there. Now... she lies there on the bed while you undress. What'll we be seeing of this, Marcelllo?

MARCELLO

Waist up on Jay, and we'll mostly focus on Carson, her transition from despair to arousal...

PERLA

Okay. Jay?

JAY

Sounds good.

PERLA

You go to her, she then rises and pushes you back down on the bed.

JAY

And I feel like she can move me in the same way I moved her. So shoulder area... kind of thing.

PERLA

I also have here...

(retrieves from her bag)
...a partially deflated pilates ball as we don't want either of your genitals in contact at any time of course. So this is placed between, and camera will be...

MARCELLO

Above the waist.

PERLA

Let's jump into some choreography. How does that sound?

CARSON

JAY

Cool.

Great.

PERLA

Okay. So now that we've established some parameters, how's this working in your eyes, Marcello?

MARCELLO

It's Godard by way of Caravaggio. Jump cuts. Sidelight. It would be helpful if you had seen "Breathless," but the pace--

PERLA

We're really just digging into the staging.

MARCELLO

No of course. Well, I... I suppose--

PERLA

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

Should we run with what Carson and Jay are outlining? Let's do that.

PERLA (CONT'D)
Carson, do you want to lie down?

Carson nods and lies down on the bed.

PERLA (CONT'D)
Jay, you can mime undressing?

Jay gets off the bed and stands over Carson.

JAY
So on the day though...

MARCELLO
Well, I think you keep your
underwear on and we film above--

PERLA
I also have modesty garments that
can be worn instead.

JAY
Yeah, that sounds good. Carson?
What do you...

MARCELLO
I think Carson can keep--

JAY
I was asking my wife.

CARSON
(after a tense pause)
I'd actually be interested in
hearing what Marcello thinks.

MARCELLO
I was just going to-- well you'll
be nude from the waist up. And we
won't see below so... that'll work
for me if that's okay with you.

JAY
Wait, so you're... you're really
gonna go through with the nudity?

MARCELLO
The rider's been signed.

JAY
Carson?

CARSON
It's not a big deal, Jay.

JAY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, but I really don't like
the idea of you showing your tits
to the entire world.

MARCELLO
Tastefully. It's gonna be tasteful.

JAY
Oh, you're going to show my wife's
tits tastefully?

CARSON
Excuse me. They're my tits, and it's my choice to show them.

JAY
I know that, but I just would have liked to be included in the decision. Can we talk about it?

CARSON

JAY
Carson, please...

CARSON
Okay, fine. Let's talk about it.

Carson beelines for the door. Jay follows her out and into --

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jay shuts the door behind him, turns to Carson who is leaning against the hallway wall, arms folded. The camera PUSHES IN towards them until they are in a tight two-shot by the end.

JAY
Carson, what's going on?

CARSON
I was going to ask you the same.

JAY
Why are you doing this? It's
demeaning.

CARSON
Excuse me?

JAY

Aren't you past the point in your career where you need to expose yourself? I'm sorry, but I'm not sure I'm okay with this.

CARSON

Well, frankly I don't care what you're okay with because it's *my* choice, okay? Not *yours*.

JAY

Look, I know it's your choice, of course it's-- your body, your choice, alright? I know that.

CARSON

This isn't a big deal to me. It's a job, it's for the scene, and being real... I have pretty fantastic tits. I don't mind showing them. And I didn't want to talk about this with you because I knew how this conversation would go.

JAY

And how's that?

CARSON

Exactly how it's going right now! This movie is paying our mortgage. I love you, and I love your plays, but they don't exactly keep the lights on. This is *my* career.

Jay looks down at his shoes. Nods. Carson opens the hotel suite door and heads in. We stay with Jay for a moment. He breathes heavily and then heads in after her.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Carson, polite smile on her face, returns to the space.

CARSON

Sorry about that, you guys.

PERLA

It's all love.

MARCELLO

We ready?

CARSON
Yes, definitely.

PERLA
Shall we try it?

JAY
Ready when she is.

Carson goes over to the bed and lies down face up.

PERLA
For this rehearsal, all our clothes
can stay on, okay?

Jay mimes undressing and approaches Carson. She slowly rises to a semi-sitting position. She presses her hand against his chest. Her gesture is gentle and somewhat loving, but her eyes are dead. She rises from the bed. She pushes Jay onto it. She mounts him. Before any more can happen:

JAY
Can we stop for a second?

MARCELLO
No, let's push through--

PERLA
Of course.

MARCELLO
Right, yeah. Sure.

JAY
I don't understand why my character
is letting her do this.

MARCELLO
Well, you're feeling guilty.

JAY
Yes, but I'm trying to break up
with her. Aren't I?

MARCELLO
I think you are, but the feelings
you still share are temporarily
clouding your objective.

JAY
I guess I just feel like the sex-of-
it-all muddies the waters.

MARCELLO
The script is pretty set.

JAY

Where's the writer? Can we talk to him?

Marcello laughs. Jay looks at him, puzzled. He sees that Jay is serious and stops laughing.

MARCELLO

I'm sorry, I didn't realize that was a serious question. Where's the writer? Uh... at home or something? Maybe a coffee shop in fucking Silverlake. Wherever screenwriters go. How should I know?

PERLA

Jay, why do you think you're resisting this?

CARSON

You're kinda derailing things.

JAY

I'm not the only one that has issues with this scene.

CARSON

What do you mean?

JAY

Didn't you tell me that you thought that this was--

CARSON

When did I say that?

JAY

Last night. You said that--

CARSON (CONT'D)

Please. Stop.

JAY (CONT'D)

I'm just trying to help.

CARSON

This isn't about you.

JAY

That's very clear.

CARSON

Can we keep going?

JAY

Yep.

Carson gets back on top. They resume the choreography. Marcello's phone rings. The Morricone song again.

MARCELLO
Sorry guys, one sec.
(he answers it)
What is it, Larry?

INT. SLEEK OFFICE - GERSH AGENCY - INTERCUT

Larry is in his desk chair, phone on speaker, getting shaved by an old fashioned BARBER, with a little mobile barber setup. We INTERCUT between them.

LARRY
What did you think of the statement?

MARCELLO
I didn't have time to--

LARRY
Andrew's an excellent writer. Very good at feigning contrition.

MARCELLO
But I don't wanna-- Hold on.

Marcello looks at his phone, and scrolls through his inbox. He starts to read the statement. He's upset by what he reads. He puts the phone back to his ear.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)
This is-- I thought we were gonna like say my side of things. Defend myself against these baseless, uh--

LARRY
I don't think we wanna go that road. You get defensive, could make things worse. Apologizing goes a long way.

MARCELLO
If I apologize then I'm admitting that I did something wrong.

LARRY
Right...

MARCELLO
But I didn't do anything wrong!

LARRY

Listen, I was Mel Gibson's agent when The Passion of the Christ came out. Remember what happened then?

MARCELLO

I think I was like ten years old.

LARRY

Jesus, you're a child. Well, people were up in arms about the depiction of Jews in that movie too. And Mel didn't wanna say anything about it either. But it was a different time. No Twitter, no Instagram, and more importantly: *nobody gave a shit*. Because it was just the Jews. And the Jews are always mad about something, right? You get away with it then, you can't now. Not without saying you're sorry. Everybody has to apologize these days. Denial will only fan the flames.

MARCELLO

Okay... if that's really what you think we should do...

(beat)

So is he still your client?

LARRY

We parted ways after Daddy's Home 2.

MARCELLO

Okay.

Marcello hangs up. We stay with Larry, as the Barber continues shaving him. After a long silence.

BARBER

I actually liked Apocalypto.

LARRY

Get out.

The Barber looks shocked, turns to pack up.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I'm kidding! What, you're gonna leave me with half a beard?

INT. HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Marcello rejoins the group.

MARCELLO
Sorry about that. Where were we?

JAY
I had a question.

MARCELLO
Shoot.

JAY
No, for Perla. I have a-- what if I like-- sorry this is kind of weird to bring up. But-- what if I... become... erect.

Carson has a strange expression on her face.

PERLA
I hear you. That is very valid, and a common concern for people with penises in these scenes.

CARSON
Is that... really an issue, Jay?

JAY
What are you...

CARSON
I just... isn't the problem that you-- I'm sorry.

PERLA
What are we talking about?

JAY
Nothing. Okay? Nothing. Carson.

PERLA
It's okay, this is a safe space. You can cry if you need to.

JAY
What? I'm not gonna cry.

PERLA
A man that does not cry is no man at all.

JAY

What the fuck is going on?

CARSON

Maybe it would help to talk about it, Jay?

JAY

No. No, stop. I'm serious.

PERLA

I think we need to lay this bare. Out in the open. No secrets.

JAY

No, really...

PERLA

Carson, please share this with us.

CARSON

I don't want to make Jay uncomfortable.

PERLA

The truth is never uncomfortable.

JAY

Actually, the truth is *frequently* uncomfortable.

CARSON

It might help to talk about it.

JAY

Forget I said anything!

PERLA

Please, share with us, Carson. Jay does not have a monopoly on the truth. This is your truth as well.

CARSON

Jay has trouble... becoming aroused. Physically. So I'm not exactly sure why it would be an issue here.

A long pause. Then Jay turns to Carson, rage building.

JAY

That's like... Okay. The fact that... the fact that you think it would be okay to share that with basically complete strangers...

PERLA
We're not strangers.

CARSON
Jay, it's not like--

JAY
...something that is deeply
personal to me. Something that I
have literally not discussed with
anyone besides you.

CARSON
But that's the problem! I'm sorry,
but you never want to talk about
it. It's not that big of a deal--

JAY
It is to me! And you know that, so
I really don't understand this...
hostility.

CARSON
(pause)
I'm... sorry. I think I'm... I
think I'm angry at you and... I'm
not dealing with it in a super
healthy way.

Jay sits there with his head in his hands silently. Marcelllo
is at a loss for words. Perla jumps in.

PERLA
Jay... would you like to unpack
what just happened?

JAY
That my wife just revealed--

PERLA
Keep this centered on your
experience. Let's use "I" statements.

Jay laughs. A long silence.

MARCELLO
I feel like-- I feel like we've
gone a bit off the rails? Just for
the purposes of this scene.

PERLA
Should we take a break? Why don't
we take a five?

MARCELLO
I hate to be a schedule nazi, but
we are in a bit of a time crunch.

Everyone glares at Marcello.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)
Poor choice of words. I just
meant... Let's take five. That's
fine. I'm gonna...

He gestures to the door. He beelines for it and exits.

JAY
I'm going too.

CARSON
Wait, where?

JAY
A walk or something? What did you
think I was gonna do?

CARSON
I didn't know if you were going to
talk to Marcello.

JAY
No, why would I do that?

CARSON
I don't know! Just go on your walk.
I'm sorry.

Jay exits and we follow him into --

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jay rushes down the hall to catch up to Marcello.

JAY
Marcello! Hey, hold on a sec.

Marcello turns around, phone to his ear. He holds up his
finger to Jay and mouths "one second." He presses the DOWN
elevator button.

MARCELLO
Then we force their calls.
(pause)
Fine... fine. Tell Nelson, he can
take it up with-- I'll be there as
soon as I can... I don't know. Okay.
(hangs up, to Jay)
Listen, there's no need to explain.
(MORE)

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

It's not an issue I've ever experienced personally, but it's nothing to be embarrassed about.

JAY

What? No, that's not what this is about. I-- Listen, you're a cinephile. I appreciate your references. Godard and... like you know your stuff. You remind me of myself. My world is theater, but I think we're alike.

The elevator doors open. Marcello steps in and presses LOBBY.

MARCELLO

I'm not exactly sure what this is but... I have to head to set and--

JAY

I need your help.

The doors start to close, Jay pries them open with his hands.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Carson is on the bed, staring into space. Perla is at the minibar, where she retrieves a can of COKE ZERO. She hands it to Carson and then sits cross-legged on the ground, watches her for a long silent beat. Carson opens the can and sips.

PERLA

How are you doing?

CARSON

I'm okay.

PERLA

(pause)

Because it would be okay if you're not okay.

CARSON

(harsher than intended)

I know that.

(softer)

Thank you. I'm not as sensitive as all that.

(pause)

How'd you know I drink coke zero?

PERLA

Sorry if this is weird, but your show really meant a lot to me. Means.

CARSON

The...

PERLA

Your sitcom. *Hello, Hank.*

CARSON

Oh wow... No that's-- Thank you. I didn't know you were a fan.

PERLA

I had kind of a hard time in middle school. My mom died, and my dad just spiraled, and no one was really thinking about me, which was no surprise because no one ever... sorry-- I'm rambling. But I felt very alone and your show made me feel... less alone I guess? Specifically you. You were this fearless, funny girl, who never got like-- I dunno. I guess I wished I was you at the time. And when this job came up, I was so excited to meet you and-- I just wanted you to know that.

CARSON

(moved)

Oh my god, that is... that actually means a lot to me. I-- I sometimes feel kind of embarrassed by it. I was grateful for the show, but I also really resented it? That's why I got out of that world and tried to do the whole New York theater thing.

PERLA

That's why you left LA?

CARSON

(pause)

I also had a pretty weird relationship with my mom.

PERLA

Stage mom?

CARSON

No. I wouldn't call her that. She didn't have these unrealized dreams of being an actress that she forced me to--

PERLA

Oh I didn't mean--

CARSON

No it's just what I think people assume. She didn't really want me to be an actress. Until the checks started rolling in. That changed her mind. But then I became the breadwinner. And supporting your mom from the age of twelve creates a pretty weird power dynamic.

PERLA

Who has the power?

CARSON

Excuse me?

PERLA

You said it creates a power dynamic. So who's the one with the power?

CARSON

Oh. Then or now?

PERLA

Has it changed?

CARSON

I don't know. I haven't spoken to her in a while.

PERLA

How long?

CARSON

Oh. Um. Maybe... four years?

PERLA

You haven't spoken to your mother in four years?

CARSON

I used to be so invested in her emotional state. Her feelings felt like they were mine too.

(MORE)

CARSON (CONT'D)

I was really dependent on her. Even when I first moved out, I was so afraid of being alone. I'd spend most nights home with her. Just talking all night. But then I started to realize that she was holding me hostage. Emotionally? She could only see me in relation to her. So I had to... I just had to make a clean break.

(then, a confession)

I don't think she ever knew me that well.

Perla nods. It feels like she is getting off on this somehow. There's something strange about her reaction.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - SAME

Marcello in the open elevator. Jay still facing him.

JAY

You can't let Carson do the nudity.

MARCELLO

I already explained to you--

JAY

She won't listen to me. But she respects you.

MARCELLO

(pleased with this assessment)

Well... Yes, she does, but that's really not--

JAY

She's going to regret it. People won't take her seriously when those images flood the internet and then it's, y'know it's out of her hands.

MARCELLO

I really don't think--

JAY

I have a play lined up. At the Public next year.

MARCELLO

Congratulations?

JAY

Thank you, that's not-- It's not a done deal, but it's going to happen. Oscar Eustis, he's really excited about it.

MARCELLO

What's it called?

JAY

A Touch of God in the Golden Age. Anyway, Oscar's made it clear... I need to get someone big to star in it if it's going to get produced. Someone like Carson. And she's agreed to do it, but if this movie comes out and she's... I know tons of actresses have done nudity before. No big deal. But with the internet, social media, it gets screen-grabbed and suddenly it's online. And it's not art anymore, it's not a film. It's porn. The context gone. It might affect how people perceive her. Critics. The New York audience. They can be brutal. And if she's seen as a less serious actress then they'll view my play as a less serious work, and that's not fair to me.

MARCELLO

This... really feels like it doesn't involve me--

The doors begin to close again.

JAY

But it does.

Jay pries them open again, forcefully.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Perla and Carson are in the same spots as before.

PERLA

So what's next for you?

CARSON

My agents are hounding me to do this pilot, but I don't think I want to.

PERLA

Why is that?

CARSON

It's a procedural. Good money, but
grueling hours. No life. No
character really. All my dialogue
is exposition. It's not even
acting. It's *facting*.

PERLA

(completely deadpan)

That's funny.

CARSON

I just don't know if I wanna spend
the next eight years saying shit
like "Do we have a warrant?" and
"She had Rohypnol in her system."

PERLA

You're a brilliant actress. You
should do what's going to satisfy
you artistically.

CARSON

Thanks for saying that. Yeah, I...
I admire Robert Pattinson's career.
He made a lot of money on Twilight
and he used that to carve out his
own path and do a bunch of weird
indie films. I guess that's what
I'd like to do. There's this A24
thing. I'm meeting with the
director next week. I'm not sure if
I'll do it. Or even get it.

PERLA

You know... you should think about
starting your own production
company. Produce your own work,
harness your voice. Take control.

CARSON

Oh, I don't know...

PERLA

But I know.

Perla nods her head warmly, making intense eye contact.

PERLA (CONT'D)

Is Jay supportive of this idea?

CARSON

What idea? Oh, the-- yeah he is.
Well, I haven't told him about it.

PERLA

Why haven't you told him?

CARSON

It kinda conflicts with something
he wants me to do instead.

Perla nods in a knowing way.

CARSON (CONT'D)

What?

PERLA

I don't want to overstep.

CARSON

No it's okay.

PERLA

I just think it's telling.

CARSON

How so?

PERLA

No, it's just, I feel bad for Jay.
If I were on the wrong side of 40
and nothing to show for it--

CARSON

(firmly)

I don't think that's fair. And it's
not true.

PERLA

He's in your shadow, and he *feels*
it. Because the world *sees* it.

(Carson absorbs this)

I'm gonna say a few things, and I
hope I'm not going to upset you. But
I think they bear saying. You've
married a man leagues beneath you.
And your entire relationship is
crumbling under its own weight.

CARSON

You don't even know us...

PERLA

I know you. Believe me, I know you. I've seen photos of you together on red carpets. Interviews you've given. And meeting you both now... it's so clear. He's threatened.

CARSON

(pause)

I thought you said you didn't know that we were together. Before.

PERLA

No, I...

CARSON

Was that a lie?

PERLA

I just... I didn't want to come on too strong. But, I fought for this job. Because of you. And well, because of everything I said about-- I just knew that if we got to spend some time together, really be together, we'd connect. And I think we are. Connecting. Don't you?

CARSON

Yeah... we are. Maybe, can we, can we actually-- I'd like to just take a little time for myself right now?

Perla nods. She looks a little upset. She stands. Goes to speak, but then doesn't. She exits towards the bathroom.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jay tries to hold the door open, more desperate than before.

JAY

You get where I'm coming from don't you? From one artist to another? The deck is stacked against us.

MARCELLO

I have producers to answer to. A studio, financers... this isn't my call. Do you know how hard it is to get-- I want to keep working, you understand, I need to protect *my* interests. I'm a hired gun. As much as I wish it wasn't the truth.

JAY

What about your movie? Don't you
need to protect *that*?

MARCELLO

I am protecting my movie. But I
push too hard and it becomes
someone else's movie, you get it?
I'm an artist, but that doesn't
mean I'm not practical. How do you
think I got to where I am so
quickly? It's not just talent and
it's not just luck. It's strategy.

JAY

You're protecting your *career*. Your
relationship with the studio. Not
your movie. Sometimes you need to
have the balls to stand up to those
guys and say, "Hey, I'm the artist,
not *you*. And I'm going to tell this
story *my way*." C'mon, don't you
want to be an *auteur*? Those
directors you mentioned, do you
think they kowtowed to the studios?
Hell no, man, they became who they
are because they followed their *own*
intuitions.

MARCELLO

Compromise is a part of--

The doors go to close again. Jay presses his body against
them, fighting the doors from closing.

JAY

Compromise sure, but why give in on
something like this? Nudity almost
always just takes you *out* of a
scene. These sex scenes, what are
they for? They don't tell a story
and showing your tits tells even
less of one. It's cheap and it's
beneath you. You're better than
this. And so is she.

Jay has gotten through to Marcello a bit. The gears are
turning. The elevator starts to emit a loud BEEPING noise as
the doors struggle against Jay's body to close.

MARCELLO

I'll see what I can do.

JAY
Thank you! That's all I'm asking.

Jay steps out of the way. As the doors close:

MARCELLO
I have to get to the lobby and
check in with Rodrigo...

The elevator descends. Jay breathes a sigh of relief.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Carson is alone. She adds another nicotine patch to her arm. The sound of the toilet flushing from the bathroom.

She makes a snap decision, leaps off the bed and goes for the minibar. She finds a little bottle of gin, cracks it open and chugs. She runs over to the nightstand and stashes the little bottle. She sits back on the bed. Closes her eyes, feeling her body warm to the alcohol.

Then another decision: she leaps back up and grabs another bottle of gin from the minibar. And just as she's cracking it open and putting the bottle to her lips, the DOOR SWINGS OPEN and Jay walks in. Carson whips around, caught. Jay stares at her. A painful silence.

JAY
(pointed yet casual)
What're you doing?

Carson caps it, goes over to the nightstand, stashes it.

JAY (CONT'D)
What if Marcello had walked in?

CARSON
Well... he didn't.

The sound of the faucet. Then Perla exits the bathroom.

PERLA
How are you two doing?

JAY
Fine.

CARSON
Fine.

Jay and Carson look at each other.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Marcello emerges from the elevator and marches towards the set. He looks around and sees crew members standing on the sidelines, bored and waiting to get back to work.

Susannah sees Marcello and beelines towards him. Seeing her --

MARCELLO
Where's Rodrigo?

Marcello walks towards set as Susannah doubles back to follow him. TRACKING with them:

SUSANNAH
Actually there's something I need
to tell-- well, there's something
else you need to deal with.

MARCELLO
Did Rodrigo--

SUSANNAH
It's not him. Um...

DONNA WEST, middle-aged and officious, intercepts Marcello, stopping him in his tracks. To Susannah:

MARCELLO
Who is this?

DONNA
Donna West. I'm a union
representative with SAG-AFTRA. How
are you today?

MARCELLO
I'm, uh, busy. How are-- Sorry,
what is this about?

DONNA
I was contacted by a Mr. Greenberg--

MARCELLO
Greenberg? Who the hell-- Listen,
it was a *student film*. How many of
you people are going to *crucify* me.
You all want your pound of flesh,
don't you?

DONNA
Excuse me?

Susannah starts waving her hand at Marcello, trying to signal him to stop talking.

MARCELLO
It was a metaphor. It wasn't even
about *Jews* if you--

SUSANNAH
Marcello! This isn't about the
short film. Mr. Greenberg is
David's dad.

MARCELLO
David...

SUSANNAH
The actor we have playing--

MARCELLO
The *child* actor. Wait, I'm sorry.
What's happening?

DONNA
Mr. Greenberg has reached out to us
about your disregard for his son's
wellbeing and violation of child
labor laws and our union's rules,
which dictate--

MARCELLO
What the hell are you talking
about? The *Dad* said this to you.

DONNA
He's indicated his intention to
file a lawsuit.

MARCELLO
He *coerced* me into making his kid
work. He's the one that-- this is
absurd. This is entrapment!

DONNA
We've sent David home with his
father, pending an investigation--

MARCELLO
(rage building)
Are you fucking kidding me? What
are-- can we... this guy set me up
to be-- Where is he?

Marcello storms off and we FOLLOW behind him in a continuous tracking shot as he moves through the set.

DONNA (O.S.)
Sir! Where are you going?

Marcello ignores this, muttering to himself as he heads for the hotel lobby entrance.

MARCELLO
Motherfucking... Scumbag... Son of
a...

Marcello slams the door open and burst through it. In the same continuous shot we follow him towards a cluster of TRAILERS. He knocks intensely on one labeled "DAVID." Herman opens the door.

HERMAN
Listen, pal, you can talk to our
union rep, but we're not going to--

Marcello grabs him by the lapels and drags him to the ground.

MARCELLO
You set me up! You piece of shit,
you fucking asshole! You
practically begged me to let your
shitty son do the scene! How dare
you! You fucking--

Marcello looks up to see David standing in the trailer's doorway horrified. Marcello seems a bit guilty.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)
(changing his tune)
Heeey, buddy. Your dad and I....
we're just--

Suddenly, Herman TACKLES Marcello and pins him to the ground. He punches him in the face. They struggle. It's awkward.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Marcello swings the door open and enters, his face bloodied and bruised, his hair and clothing a mess.

MARCELLO
Alright, let's wrap this up.

Carson cups her hands to her mouth in shock.

JAY CARSON
Woah... Are you okay, man? Oh my god.

PERLA

What happened?

MARCELLO

Nothing. Can we-- I'm dealing with a dozen small fires, and I need this to no longer be among them.

Marcello takes out a handkerchief and dabs at his face.

JAY

Your face... is fucked up.

MARCELLO

Everything is fine! Can we...

They all steal glances at each other. They silently decide the best course of action is to ignore Marcello's appearance. Jay sits on the couch. Carson on the bed. Marcello pacing.

The sun has started to set, flooding the windows with bright direct sunlight.

PERLA

I think we should check in with each other. We can't do the work until we're all feeling safe. And I think our safety has been threatened here today.

(pause)

Does anyone wanna start?

JAY

I'm not sure what we're doing.

PERLA

I think we need to acknowledge what happened between you and Carson.

JAY

I don't want to talk about it.

PERLA

You and Carson need to.

JAY

Is this protocol?

MARCELLO

Yeah, I gotta say... Skylar's process wasn't anything like this.

PERLA

This needs to happen. Jay was
clearly triggered.

JAY

I really... hate that word.

PERLA

What word would you like to use?

JAY

I would like to use no words.

PERLA

That's a very typical um male
response. But assigning words to
feelings helps us unpack them. And
by digging into those trigger
points, we can release. Don't you
want to release, Jay?

CARSON

We should talk about it.

JAY

Are you serious?

CARSON

It's clearly a raw subject for you,
so I think we should--

JAY

We'll talk about it at home.

CARSON

Okay. Except we won't.

JAY

Please...

CARSON

I'll ask you about it. You'll
barely say two words and then go on
a walk, come home and fall asleep
watching Law & Order.

JAY

What do you want me to say?

CARSON

I want you to say something honest.
About how you're feeling. I want
you to yell at me. I don't care. I
just want you to express yourself.

JAY

Okay... that's not...

MARCELLO

This isn't our priority! I mean, at this point, I--

PERLA

(to Marcello)

Please. This is healthy. And it's going to make the scene better. Don't you want that?

JAY

You don't want me to yell.

CARSON

I do. I really do.

JAY

You don't even know what yelling is. The way my parents would yell at each other? When I was a kid. It would shock you.

CARSON

Show me. I want you to scream at me. Show me what yelling is--

Jay rises to his feet and is an inch away from Carson. He screams. It's guttural and vicious and pretty scary.

JAY

THIS IS YELLING. THIS IS YELLING, CARSON. THIS IS FUCKING YELLING.

A long pause. Jay sits on the floor. He settles into neutrality. Then into an almost shellshocked state. Carson begins to cry, silently.

JAY (CONT'D)

Okay... I... I'm sorry. Can you stop crying? Carson, stop crying please. I didn't mean it. I just wanted to illustrate my point...

Marcello is looking at Jay with disapproval.

JAY (CONT'D)

That wasn't real. I'm not-- I'm not actually angry, that was just... I didn't want to do this. You made me. That wasn't me.

MARCELLO

(to Perla, desperate)

We're further away from getting the scene than when we started! What are you doing?

PERLA

Excuse me, but this is my process.

MARCELLO

The way this meeting is going, I'm not sure you wanna claim credit for running it!

PERLA

I don't think we can continue staging the scene until we've talked. There's an added layer of complexity we need to explore between husband and wife.

MARCELLO

But that's my point! We shouldn't treat them differently. This is supposed to be professional.

JAY

I want to clarify that I don't scream at my wife. That's not who I am.

PERLA

Who are you then?

JAY

I'm someone who... sorry, what is your question?

PERLA

We all witnessed you scream at your wife. With what I would call extreme emotional violence. So, if that's not who you are, who are you?

JAY

She asked me to.

PERLA

Carson, can you articulate how you're feeling at this moment?

Carson's tears are under control now. She shakes her head.

PERLA (CONT'D)
Can you tell Jay how you're
feeling? Because I think he may be
angry with you.

JAY
I'm not angry. I was just...

PERLA
It would be understandable if you
were. Because Carson's comments
before the break were... I'm sure
they were hard for you to hear.

JAY
I'm over it.

PERLA
Are you? Carson castrated you.
Metaphorically speaking.

JAY
(to Perla)
Are you purposefully trying to
antagonize me? What is going on!?

CARSON
I didn't... that's not what I did.

PERLA
(to Carson)
You sit there, playing the victim,
feigning helplessness, when we know
you hold all the cards. You have
fame, wealth, influence and what
does Jay have? A bit part in a
film. And why does he have it?
Because you gave it to him.

CARSON
That is not true. Jay... you don't
feel that way, do you?

JAY
(a confession)
Sometimes, I think that... I'm not
the person you thought I'd be. And
I feel badly that I'm not more
successful in your eyes.

CARSON
That isn't how I see you. That's
not at all how I--

JAY

I guess it's how I see myself. How do you think it feels? I can only get my play on if you're in it.

CARSON

That can't... that can't be true.

JAY

Oscar said as much. And you *know* it's true. You know it is.

CARSON

I feel like you're angry with me because things haven't turned out how you wanted them to. It's not my fault that *you're* less successful than you want to be.

JAY

You make me feel mediocre.

CARSON

I don't think that's my fault.

JAY

Then why do I feel this way?

CARSON

Honestly, I don't know. You're truly an incredible writer. I'm like the-- Your talent and drive is one of the things I immediately loved about you. But most artists have a range of things they can do. And that's how they survive. But you refuse to do anything other than exactly what you want to do! You can't just rail against the world when things don't go your way. It's not because you're mediocre, it's because you ignore everyone else's opinion and then you're devastated when other people don't like your work. You die on every single hill that you can find. So maybe you have to actually be willing to *die on that hill*. You'll have to accept... defeat.

JAY

Okay... okay... that's a lot.

CARSON

And honestly, I think you need to start talking to someone again. Because nothing makes you happy, and I don't know what to do anymore.

JAY

What about you? How often are you getting fucked up alone and thinking no one can tell the difference? Your mother practically force fed you whiskey as a teenager and you won't even talk about it!

Carson glances at Marcello, who is surprised by what he's hearing. Marcello's phone rings. He answers.

MARCELLO

What is it, Larry?

INT. SLEEK OFFICE - GERSH AGENCY - INTERCUT

Larry behind his desk, freshly shaven, headset on, affecting a sympathetic tone. We INTERCUT:

LARRY

Hey, pal. How you holding up?

MARCELLO

Kinda in the middle of something.

LARRY

Okay, this can-- Well, this can't wait actually. You, uh, well there isn't an easy way to put this.

MARCELLO

Well then just put it.

LARRY

They want you off the movie.

MARCELLO

Say that again?

Marcello moves to a quieter corner. In the background, Jay and Carson continue their argument while Perla watches.

LARRY

They want to replace you with another director.

MARCELLO

They can't do that.

LARRY

I'm in touch with the DGA and I'm raising hell with the producers.

MARCELLO

What about the apology?

LARRY

We're past that point now.

MARCELLO

All because of that short film?

LARRY

Well, yeah, but also, they're citing a fight with some guy--

MARCELLO

He set me up! He assured me his kid was good to work, then he pulls in a goddamn union rep out of nowhere--

LARRY

And that's the other thing. Forcing a sick child to work, when you're under the microscope already--

MARCELLO

I was practically framed. I have a contract. They can't chuck me to the curb like yesterday's trash.

LARRY

Don't worry, pal, we're gonna fix this. I'm in touch with Ron. He's gonna be on the contract offensive. I also think we should get a publicist immediately. Someone that specializes in crisis management.

MARCELLO

(almost to himself, sadly)
Everything was fine this morning.

LARRY

You worry about making your day over there, keep your head down. Don't make any more noise til we get this mess straightened out.

MARCELLO
Yeah... Okay...

Marcello hangs up. Ashen-faced, he sits down heavily on the couch. Everyone is staring at him.

CARSON
(to Marcello)
Are you okay?
(no response)
Marcello?

JAY
Do you wanna talk to Carson about
what you were telling me earlier?

Marcello looks at Jay. His mind a million miles away.

MARCELLO
Is this the-- I'm not sure if now
is really the best time... to...

CARSON
What is it, Jay?

JAY
Well it's... Marcello said that,
y'know, he could talk to the
producers about re-evaluating the
scene. Specifically the, uh,
nudity, aspect of it.

Everyone looks at Marcello. He's a deer in the headlights. He tries to shake off what he's feeling and deal with the situation at hand. He makes a decision.

MARCELLO
I said no such thing.

JAY
What?

Carson looks from Marcello to Jay suspiciously.

CARSON
What's going on?

MARCELLO
I am no one's puppet.

JAY

Oh really? Because it feels like
the producer has his hand up your
ass and he's doing all the talking
for you. You're a coward, man.

CARSON

You're the one making Marcelllo
fight your battles for you.

JAY

I'm fighting a bigger battle with
my play. Or does that not matter?

CARSON

What does your play have to...

Jay freezes. Caught. He walks over to Carson, who's on the bed. He bends down to his knees to be at her eye level.

JAY

I was just concerned about your...
how people are going to perceive
you. This industry can be so cruel
to women, you know, you, uh, expose
yourself in a movie, it winds up on
pornhub, and then you'll always be
that girl. You'll never be anything
else. It'll mark you. And you're
such a great actress, I don't want
that to happen.

CARSON

(tense pause)

But what does that have to do with
your play?

JAY

Well... it doesn't directly have to
do with my play, but it...

CARSON

(cold)

Uh-huh.

JAY

Carson...

CARSON

Don't worry about it. I won't be
doing your play. I'm gonna do a
film instead.

JAY

What are you talking about?

CARSON

It shoots in the spring.

JAY

You never mentioned this.

CARSON

Well... I just did.

JAY

If you drop out, then my play
doesn't happen.

CARSON

But you're right. I would sully
your Work of Staggering Genius.

JAY

You can't do this to me.

CARSON

I'm not doing anything to you. If
you can't get your play going, on
your own, that's not my fault.

JAY

I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry. Just
tell me... tell me what to do.

CARSON

What?

Jay's breathing starts to become labored and weird.

JAY

Just tell me what I-- can we just
go back? What do I need to do to
fix this?

CARSON

I'm not doing this, Jay.

JAY

This play has to work. It has to. I
need to be a writer.

CARSON

What are you talking about?

JAY

I can't start over. I can't. I have
to be a writer. Just tell me how to
fix this.

PERLA

Are you okay?

Carson drops her icy demeanor, now concerned.

CARSON

Jay, what's going on?

JAY

I have... I can't...

Jay has a panic attack. His breathing becomes uncontrolled
and he falls to the ground, passed out.

CARSON

Oh my god. Marcello! Call someone.

MARCELLO

Oh Christ. I can...

Marcello starts fumbling with his phone. Carson gets on the
ground, slapping Jay's face.

CARSON

Jay... Jay... Wake up. Wake up.

Jay comes to. He's disoriented.

JAY

I'm okay... Stop slapping me.

CARSON

I'm sorry!

Carson helps Jay to his feet and shepherds him over to the
bed to sit down.

CARSON (CONT'D)

Can you get him some water?

Marcello goes over to the minibar and grabs a DASANI BOTTLE.
He hands it to Jay.

PERLA

No, don't drink that, it has salt
in it!

Jay looks at her wearily, before chugging some of the water.
Perla puts her hand on Carson's shoulder.

PERLA (CONT'D)
You see how much power you hold?

CARSON
What?

PERLA
You hold this man in the palm of
your hands. He's nothing without
you. You need further proof?

CARSON
Why are you doing this?

PERLA
You are so powerful, Carson. Don't
you want to learn how to own it?

MARCELLO
Alright, this is getting really
peculiar. I'm calling it. Okay?
We're losing light, the crew is
running out the clock, and I still
have two scenes to shoot before
wrap. And frankly, Perla, you're
freaking me out.

PERLA
We're not finished. And if the
producers ask me if you facilitated
this meeting in good faith, I
wouldn't be able to say you did.

MARCELLO
(losing it)
What is it going to take for this
interminable nightmare to end?!
What psychotic semiotic pseudo-
psychological exercise do you have
planned for us now!?

CARSON
Marcello, are you okay?

MARCELLO
(ignoring her, to Perla)
This is *my* movie, and no one is
going to take it from me! Least of
all you.

CARSON
Marcello, no one is trying to take
anything away from you.

Marcello turns to Carson. Suddenly suspicious.

MARCELLO
What do you know?

CARSON
About what?

MARCELLO
Of course. They wouldn't do this
without your sign off. Your
permission.

CARSON
What are you talking about?

MARCELLO
You can't let them do this to me.

JAY
What is this about?

CARSON
I don't know!

MARCELLO
We have to stand together. Support
each other. I wouldn't let them
replace you!

CARSON
Why would they want to replace me?

MARCELLO
They wouldn't!

CARSON
Okay...

MARCELLO
Oh... you're good, you're good.
What's it gonna take?
(suddenly yelling)
WHAT IS IT GOING TO TAKE?

CARSON
This is all in your head. And don't
speak to me like that again.

MARCELLO
I'm sorry, that was-- I'm just...

Marcello collapses in the chair. Trying to calm himself down.

PERLA

I think I have an exercise that
might help us heal.

JAY

(wearily)

No... please... no more.

PERLA

It's a very simple exercise.
Indulge me? Carson?

CARSON

You've got to be kidding me.

Marcello's phone RINGS.

MARCELLO

Sorry, I should...

He gestures to his phone. Walks off into the corner.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

What is it, Larry?

LARRY (V.O.)

Hey, pal.

INT. SLEEK OFFICE - GERSH AGENCY - DUSK

Larry is at his desk. He's futzing around on his desktop computer while he speaks.

LARRY

You doing alright?

MARCELLO

Not really.

LARRY

They're going to... this thing
isn't going away.

MARCELLO

I thought you were going to fight.

LARRY

I did, I tried, but they were...
adamant. People are just cautious
these days.

MARCELLO

What did you do, make one call?
It's been like five minutes.

LARRY

No. But a few calls was all it took
to know where we stand.

MARCELLO

Can't we sue them or something?

LARRY

I don't think there's much for us
to gain by going down that road.

MARCELLO

(lowering his voice)

What about Carson? We can get her
to back me up. Say she'll walk.

LARRY

No, Marcello--

MARCELLO

I'm with her right now, I'll talk
to her and--

LARRY

Buddy--

MARCELLO

We can use her to smooth--

LARRY

She knows. She signed off on it.
That's what I just found out.

MARCELLO

What do you mean?

LARRY

I mean, the producers already
called her. She wants input on your
replacement, but she's... she's not
going to help you.

Marcello is stunned into silence. He's lost.

MARCELLO

So... what now?

LARRY

Go home. Pour yourself a drink. If
you're on set, you should leave now.

Marcello cannot speak.

LARRY (CONT'D)
And how's Friday looking for you?

MARCELLO
What?

LARRY
Can you come into the office?

MARCELLO
Why?

LARRY
We need to discuss a few things.

MARCELLO
Or you can tell me now.

LARRY
No, I-- I think it would be better
to talk in person. How's Friday?
Morning's good. I've cleared some
time then.

MARCELLO
Are you dropping me?

LARRY
(pause)
Can you come in?

MARCELLO
Just tell me.

LARRY
Look, the town just isn't happy
with you right now. Give it a beat,
things cool off, we can talk, but I
have to do what... I--

MARCELLO
(numbly)
Please don't do this.

LARRY
I'm sorry. But this is how it is.
(pause)
Listen, maybe I can get you on
Rogan. Or Andrew's been telling me
about some podcast called "Red
Scare"? You can share your side.

MARCELLO
That's... No, but thanks.

LARRY
Okay. Take care, pal.

We stay with LARRY. He hangs up his phone. A few seconds of silence. He goes over to his IMDb client list. Finds Marcello's profile. Deletes it. We see him scroll through his clients, Marcello was just one of many. His computer DINGS with an email. It reads "NOTES FROM MARCELLO CALL."

LARRY (CONT'D)
(calling out)
Thank you, Andrew!
(beat)
And send me a list of clients we can suggest as Marcello's replacement. I want to submit three names by tomorrow end of day! What's next?

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DUSK

Marcello rejoins the group. He sits down heavily on the couch. As the sun is starting to dip beneath the buildings, the light has become moody and shadowy. Jay stands up and goes over to the bed to sit. Turns on the bedside lamp.

MARCELLO
Um. Where's my assistant?

A confused pause as the others look at each other.

JAY
Sorry... who are you talking to?

MARCELLO
Anybody.

JAY
...she's not here.

Marcello takes out his phone. He swipes and taps. Waits.

MARCELLO
Susannah, can you come up to the hotel room for a second? Thank you.

CARSON
I'm sorry, what are we doing?

Carson looks to Marcello. Then to Perla.

PERLA
I've got all the time in the world.
Marcello's the one on the schedule.

MARCELLO
(long pause)
Susannah's on her way.

Marcello stands and goes over to the minibar. He takes out a handful of various kinds of alcohol nips. He walks over to a chair, throws them down. He doubles back to the minibar. Grabs another handful, sits back down and shoots one. Then another. He stares into the middle distance.

JAY
What are you doing?

MARCELLO
Drinking.

JAY
Why are you drinking?

MARCELLO
I've been fired off the film. I'll be replaced in due time. With your wife's go ahead. Oh, and my agent dropped me. Which pretty much signals that I'm radioactive.

(suddenly furious)
And I will *NOT* go back to micro-budget features, do you hear me!?

JAY
Okay, man. No one's making you do that. Carson, you knew about this?

Carson deliberates whether to be honest.

CARSON
I got a call from Nelson earlier.
When we took a break.

MARCELLO
Why?

CARSON
I'm sorry, but... I don't owe you anything. And what you did. The short. And everything. I can't be associated with it.

JAY

What short?

(to Marcello)

What is she talking about?

MARCELLO

Well, I made a film that some people in this town, or perhaps more accurately some people online, found unsavory, and now they see fit to destroy my entire life because of it. You know, actors in this industry have literally murdered people! Mark Wahlberg committed a hate crime, blinded a guy, Matthew Broderick killed two people, vehicular manslaughter, they're still working, and yet I'm the one getting his career taken away before it's even begun! How is that just?

Marcello takes a swig of liquor. Then adds as an afterthought, casually:

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

I also punched a father.

JAY

Wait what?

Jay takes out his phone and starts googling. He clearly stumbles upon results of the film. Scrolls. His expression eventually shifts to reveal emotional confusion. He's unsure how he's supposed to react.

JAY (CONT'D)

Nothing on you punching a guy, but there is this short film. Is... this a big deal?

Carson looks at him like he's insane.

JAY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, but... it's just a student film like--

MARCELLO

Thank you! It was a student film.

Jay stands up and goes over to Marcello in an apparent display of solidarity.

JAY

Right, like is it really so serious that you'd get fired? There are way worse things out there that people have done and they're still working, right?

MARCELLO

That's what I'm saying! You get it.

JAY

(commiserating)

No, I definitely get it. This industry is so hypocritical.

MARCELLO

Well, we know why.

JAY

We definitely do.

MARCELLO

It's run by the you-know-whos, so you can pretty much insult anybody but them. You piss them off, you're fucked. It's the law of the land, these fucking people, these greedy little bastards, y'know, they're the ones, man, I'm telling you, they're the ones!

Marcello looks around. Jay is totally shocked. He quietly leaves Marcello's side and sits back down.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

Jay?

Jay quietly shakes his head, eyes averted, as if to say: *You're on your own, man.*

JAY

I think... yeah, I think I'm gonna take off?

CARSON

What do you mean?

JAY

Just like... I think my time with Crunchy Granola Lady Macbeth and Gen-Z Goebbels have come to an end? I just think that's enough for me, you know? I wanna be home now.

PERLA
You can't leave.

JAY
Why not?

PERLA
Because it's disrespectful.

Jay stares at her, nonplussed.

PERLA (CONT'D)
My job is to make sure that you are both prepared for what happens tomorrow. Because if you're not, and this work isn't done, then it won't be a safe space. And I'm not going to let that happen. Okay?

JAY
Is this even happening tomorrow?

CARSON
Let him go. Jay, just go.

Jay stares at Carson. Is this a gesture of love or hatred? Or maybe it's resignation, plain and simple.

PERLA
You know, Carson, that may be for the best. This might not be my purview, but I think we should consider recasting. I think you might find the process easier with someone else. Someone without the emotional baggage that Jay carries.

JAY
Okay. Wow. Carson? Do you have anything you wanna say right now?

Pause. Carson shakes her head.

JAY (CONT'D)
(betrayed)
No?

Carson shakes her head again. Jay just stands there, angry and defeated. But then Carson turns to Perla.

CARSON
Why did you lie about knowing that Jay and I were married?

PERLA
(embarrassed)
I... I said that--

JAY
Wait, she lied about--

Carson holds up her finger to Jay, who falls silent.

CARSON
Why are you here? Because the job
you're here to do is important and
you haven't been doing it. So why
are you here, really?

PERLA
I just... wanted the chance to meet
you. And I am an-- I'm good at my
job. I've been doing it for... a
while now. I know what I'm doing.

CARSON
I don't think you do. But that's
clear. What's confusing is
everything else.

PERLA
(with desperation)
I've known you for years. I told
you. How much your sitcom meant to
me. I've fallen asleep with you in
my bed. On my laptop. You talked me
to sleep. You were my person. When
no one else was. Since I was a kid.
Your show. It was everything to me.
You and I, we grew up together.
Online, I saw you get ready for
work. Share your thoughts. Your
ideas, your home, your skincare
tips... your whole life was there.
And I saw the world start to
recognize you. Your talent. And
warmth. And he...

(indicating Jay)
He doesn't see it. He doesn't see
you. I see you. I need you to
understand that I just want what's
best for you. That's all I want. And
when this job came up? It was the
universe bringing us together. Don't
you see that? You were there for me
when nobody else was. I just want to
do the same for you.

CARSON

You don't know me. Like at all. Not the real me. All of that stuff you-- that's not *me* me. I wasn't there for you. I didn't even know you. I was a two-dimensional image on your screen. Don't you see how sick you are? You need help. And I need you to go.

PERLA

This isn't how I pictured this going.

CARSON

I'm sure it isn't. But you need to leave. Right now. Okay?

Jay and Marcello stare in disbelief. Perla slowly gathers her things and quietly leaves, without another word. Marcello goes to speak. He feels like he needs to say something. But nothing's coming to mind. He opens and closes his mouth several times. Finally:

MARCELLO

You know, she came very highly recommended.

He drinks his final alcohol nip and then stands there awkwardly for a few seconds. No one is sure what he's going to do. Jay returns to his phone. He scrolls. Then notices something. Turns to Carson. Shows her his phone:

JAY

Ella Ramos. Isn't that your friend?
(no response)
From Buzzfeed. You introduced us at that benefit thing.

Marcello clocks this interaction. Then it all clicks.

MARCELLO

It was you. You did this to me. You dug up my film. Gave it to your friend. You gave her the knife to slit my throat!

Carson just stares at Marcello, giving nothing away.

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

You conniving little Judas! I treated you-- I cast you. Supported you. Listened to you. How could you do this to me? And you don't even care, do you?

(MORE)

MARCELLO (CONT'D)

You don't care about the bodies you leave in your wake, as long as you get what you want.

A KNOCK on the door. Everyone looks at the door like: *What fresh hell is this?* No one says anything so Jay decides to.

JAY

Come in I guess!

Susannah enters tentatively. She sees the bizarre scene in front of her and that Marcello is drinking.

SUSANNAH

Oh...

MARCELLO

Susannah!

SUSANNAH

What happened to--

MARCELLO

My fucked up face? Nothing.

SUSANNAH

Okay... I passed Perla in the hallway. Is the meeting over?

(no one responds)

They're wrapping everyone and I should really get home before--

MARCELLO

I've been betrayed.

SUSANNAH

What?

MARCELLO

Uh, let go. So I guess that means you've been let go as well.

SUSANNAH

Oh... so--

MARCELLO

So... you're fired.

SUSANNAH

But... aren't you fired?

MARCELLO

Right.

SUSANNAH

So how can someone that's fired
fire someone else?

MARCELLO

Well...

SUSANNAH

Is this because of the short film?

MARCELLO

It was a metaphor, Susannah. You
understand that right?

SUSANNAH

It... didn't seem like it was a
metaphor. Or I guess... I don't
know what you really mean by that?

MARCELLO

Time... will vindicate me.

SUSANNAH

Right. I'm gonna go. You were
actually a pretty good boss, but...
yeah I'm gonna go. Okay?

Susannah goes to leave.

MARCELLO

Wait. Do you still want me to pass
along your script? I can. I'll do
that for you.

SUSANNAH

Oh... No. That's okay. Thank you.

Susannah hurries off. Jay tries to make eye contact with
Carson. She won't look at him. He looks over at Marcello.

JAY

You're a very alienating person.

MARCELLO

(to Jay)

Et tu, Brute?

The sun has fully set now, and the room is steeped in a blue
melancholy hue. Marcello's phone rings. The Morricone
ringtone plays over this tableau. Then it reaches its full
heroic peak and transforms into SCORE that carries us into:

INT. BLACK LUXURY SUV (MOVING) - NIGHT

Carson and Jay in the backseat, Driver in front. They sit in uncomfortable silence, not looking at each other.

INT. MARCELLO'S PORSCHE (MOVING) - NIGHT

Marcello, drunk, swerves up Mulholland, coming dangerously close to the cavernous edge. He's bleary-eyed and out of it.

INT. PERLA'S TOYOTA (MOVING) - NIGHT

Perla drives down Fountain Ave, crying. She tries to breathe, wipe away tears. She lowers her VISOR to check her appearance in the mirror, and a small picture drops down. She puts it on the seat next to her.

CLOSE ON the photo. It's of Carson, a figure cut out next to her, only a sourceless arm on her shoulder. Presumably Jay's.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MANSION - NIGHT

The front door opens as Carson and Jay lumber inside. Jay makes his way O.S. while Carson beelines for the BAR CART in the living room. She quickly pours herself some vodka.

She sits down on the couch and takes a large sip. Jay returns and joins her on the couch as the MORRICONE SCORE ENDS.

JAY

Sooo... who do you think is
crazier, Perla or Marcello? It's
honestly hard to say, I mean, I
could give you a checkmate argument
for both sides.

Carson breaks into a small smile. Jay is relieved.

JAY (CONT'D)

Are we okay?

CARSON

No. But we will be.

Jay nods. He isn't sure if he believes her.

CARSON (CONT'D)

At least I want us to be.

JAY

So what are we gonna do?

CARSON

About the...

JAY

About the scene.

CARSON

Oh. They're cutting it.

JAY

Really?

CARSON

They need to pause while they find
Marcello's replacement. We're
behind, and it's just a flashback.

JAY

So I'm cut from the film. Just like
that? You didn't fight for me?

CARSON

I'm sorry.

JAY

You know what? It's fine. It's
actually... I'm glad I guess. I
just feel like sex scenes are
usually gratuitous. And this one...
yeah. Maybe it's for the best.

CARSON

Maybe.

JAY

So... you leaked Marcello's film?

CARSON

(pause)

He was gonna tank the movie. He
didn't know what he was doing. It
would have all come out eventually.
I just... sped up the process.

JAY

Diabolical.

CARSON

No. Just practical.

JAY

(long pause)

You don't need to do my play.

CARSON

I know.

JAY

No, but I mean... I don't want you to feel pressure from me. I hope you do it, but... it's your choice. And I'll accept what you decide.

CARSON

You don't need me. It's a good play. It stands on its own.

JAY

(half-joking)

Can you call Oscar and tell him?

CARSON

(smiles)

If it'll help.

JAY

What are you drinking?

CARSON

Water.

JAY

Uh-huh.

(pause, vulnerable)

Sometimes I think there's something really, really wrong with me. I hear myself, but it's like it's a different person. I don't like that person. And I guess, sometimes, I don't know how you like him either.

(beat)

I think I need to get back on the Lexapro. I thought getting off it would help with the... problem I was-- we were having but it clearly isn't and yeah, I'm... not doing great.

Jay looks close to tears. Carson doesn't know how to respond, but she knows she has to say something.

CARSON

(mumbling, to herself)

It was something broken inside of me.

JAY

What?

CARSON

No, just that line. You made me think of it. It's a really bad line.

JAY

(laughing)

What I said reminded you of it?

Wow, thanks.

(beat)

I'm gonna turn in I think.

As Jay goes to leave, Carson stops him.

CARSON

You know, I've worked so hard to be where I am now. And suddenly all of these people want little pieces of me for themselves. An autograph. A selfie. A... whatever. But you loved me when nobody seemed to care. And your love for me's never changed. I guess... I just didn't want to believe you needed a piece of me too.

Jay's heart breaks.

JAY

That makes sense.

CARSON

Go to bed. I'll be in soon.

He nods, heads out of the living room, then stops and turns around. Trying to lighten the mood:

JAY

So... should we fuck?

Carson laughs in spite of herself. Jay smiles. He turns and walks away. We TRACK behind him as he walks through the HALLWAY, past the black and white photos, and into --

INT. BEDROOM - MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Jay collapses onto the bed. He's in the same position as Carson in the film's opening, looking at the empty half of the bed next to him. We CRANE UP into an aerial view.

We HOLD THIS IMAGE. Then we CUT TO BLACK.

THE END