

SPOILER

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GRANDVIEW

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WARNING: FOR YOUR EYES ONLY.

THIS SCRIPT IS MEANT TO BE READ BY SAM FELDSTEIN.

IF YOU ARE NOT SAM FELDSTEIN, DO NOT CONTINUE.

SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO IGNORE THIS MESSAGE --

CONSEQUENCES WILL BE DIRE.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING. HAVE A NICE DAY.

- THE KID

INT. THE POLO LOUNGE - BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING

A variety of choices are on the breakfast MENU.

SERVER (O.C.)
Mr. Feldstein?

The menu lowers to REVEAL SAM FELDSTEIN (late 40s), sleek in a tailored suit highlighting his fit frame.

SERVER
Can I get something started for you?

Sam looks to his Rolex. 8:07.

TICK... TICK... TICK...

SAM
Need another few. Just a refill on the coffee, thanks.

SERVER
Of course.

The SERVER refills his mug, shuffles off.

Sam's in the best booth of a bustling LA breakfast spot. POWER PLAYERS and EARLY RISERS plot takeovers over turkey bacon and green juice, while OLDER EXECS linger in seats by the toilets.

Sam sits alone, waiting, annoyed. He looks to his smartphone on the table, refreshes.

On its screen, a 75 Rotten Tomatoes Score for *Captain Queer* reloads to a --

66. A flash of panic crosses Sam's face, a momentary crack in his polished facade. He restores, composed, peering up to see --

THE KID (25) entering the restaurant.

Sam glances away, returns to his smartphone, looking important, casual, busy. Covering the fact that The Kid's tardiness has gotten under his skin. Sam isn't the type who waits. Others wait for *him*.

But now, Sam skims his phone, adjusts his sleeve... and *The Kid still doesn't show*.

And so Sam glances up, again, to find him by the entrance mingling with *another executive*, a woman of color and Silverhead's Head of TV & Consumer Products, NATALIE HIGHSMITH (40).

Sam's eyes narrow. The Server returns.

SERVER

Do you need another --

SAM

No. I'll have the egg-white
Frittata. Hold the goat cheese.

Sam catches The Kid hugging Natalie goodbye. He dismisses the
Server with a --

SAM

Thanks.

The Kid saunters over to the table at last, unfazed in his
leather jacket. He should be sweating, nervous. But The Kid
just holds out his hand, smiling, charming. *Powerful.*

THE KID

Sorry, Sam. The traffic just
railed me dirty. Even on the bike.

They shake, firm.

SAM

Look, I've got an 8:15. Don't have
much time now.

THE KID

I only need a few minutes, my man.

The Kid settles his motorcycle helmet on the table, slides in,
makes himself comfortable.

THE KID

The Benedict here is off the
charts good, bro.

Bro? Sam tries not to wince.

SAM

I went with the egg-white
Frittata.

THE KID

Well, I'm not sure you had a
choice in the matter.

Sam absorbs this, confused.

SAM
Unfortunately, I don't have the
metabolism of a fourteen year old
anymore.

THE KID
Same. I'm twenty-five.

SAM
Hah, fuck off.

The Kid laughs.

SAM
Shall we dive in?

THE KID
Yes, but, let me start by
congratulating you on *Captain*,
man. Won't be able to attend
tonight's premiere -- the Edition
checkout's at eleven and I gotta
fly back east -- but I heard
wonderful things from the UK
screening the other night.

SAM
... we're all very proud of it.

THE KID
And Rocky speaks so highly of you.

SAM
You can thank your friend Rocky
for the meeting. Speaking of, how
about we get a --

THE KID
Crazy to think I could call him a
friend. Rocky Jones was the 'it'
thing in high school, dude. Girls,
guys, everyone wanted it. I've got
to say, casting him was pretty
genius, man.

Sam spoons his coffee, complimented.

THE KID
It's funny, the genre's already
gay as hell. Balls deep, really.
I'm just surprised no one's done
it earlier.
(beat)
A loner with trauma from his past?
(MORE)

THE KID (CONT'D)

Wears a mask and tight spandex to
hide his true identity?

Sam fights a smile.

THE KID

Sounds like you've really fingered
the pulse, bro.

SAM

Hey, that's the job. Staying
ahead. Gotta know what's next.

THE KID

And that's why you're taking over
for the dinosaur.

Sam enjoys this remark, flattered. He crosses his hands, leans
in, more comfortable now.

SAM

So. Let's jump in? I hear you've
got something fun.

THE KID

No, I've got a *smash*, is what I
have. In fact, I wrote it with you
in mind, Sam.

SAM

Oh please.

THE KID

I'm serious. But only you can read
it.

SAM

Right. Give me the pitch.

THE KID

Okay. So. It's a revenge film.

A beat. Sam's face drops a bit. Not what he wanted.

THE KID

But a different *kind* of revenge
film.

SAM

Mhm.

THE KID
I'd describe it as a more,
philosophical piece. A crisis of
faith in the absence of choice.

SAM
Sure. Who do we follow?

THE KID
Look, I'd hate to spoil it.

SAM
Right. Just tell me it's not
depressing.

The Kid pauses for some time -- he considers his answer
carefully. Sam waits, agitated.

THE KID
Some may see it as a comedy,
others a tragedy.

SAM
Hm... so. Well, maybe something's
been lost in my inbox here, but,
Stephanie told me you'd be
pitching something, fun? Escapist?

THE KID
Oh, it's certainly escapist!

Sam braces for the but --

THE KID
But it's escapist in the more --
existentialist sense.

SAM
... neat.

Sam looks back to his Rolex.

THE KID
Is it possible to escape our fate
-- and if not -- what meaning is
there to be found in a life so
scripted?

SAM
Cool, cool. Look, Kid, well, let's
keep the conversation going. How
about you have your team send it
over and we'll take a look?

THE KID
Who's we? I already told you Sam,
only you can read it.

SAM
K.

THE KID
You don't have much faith in me,
do you?

SAM
Can't say I do, man.

THE KID
Well -- by the time we're done --
you will.

A loaded pause.

SAM
I'm just looking for something
that sticks. And if you can't give
me a simple logline, then I'm not
sure why we're even --

THE KID
What do you think sticks?

SAM
I think times are tough enough.
And if we're going to get folks
out of the house to buy a ticket,
then audiences want some kind of
escape. Those instincts are why
I'm sitting where I'm sitting.

THE KID
Sorry, but where do you think
you're sitting?

SAM
... excuse me?

THE KID
And audiences don't have a clue
what they want. No one knows what
they want, until you tell them --
this -- this is what you're
getting.

Their eyes meet as Sam's EGG-WHITE FRITTATA arrives.

SERVER (O.C.)
(to the Kid)
Can I get you anything, sir?

THE KID
I'm great for now, thanks.

A quick eye fuck between them. The Server slips away, delighted. Sam bristles.

SAM
Look, man. To be honest. I don't think this is the best fit, alright? I've got to run.

THE KID
But your frittata just arrived!

SAM
Yeah, man, but -- look. I'm going to level with you, because you're new around town. But you can't show more than five late, bud. And I was willing to let that slide because, yes, Rocky's a friend, and sure, you wrote a mildly entertaining, wildly successful first film, but, meeting you now? You carry yourself like a prick, bro. And I don't care how much money you've made by twenty-five, I don't fuck with pricks.

THE KID
Really? I've heard you love a nice prick.

Sam goes beet red.

SAM
Good luck to you.

Sam grabs his briefcase and moves to shuffle out of the booth...

THE KID
Where do you think you're going?

... but stops before leaving. The restaurant's volume seems to recede...

THE KID
Do you think you're in control?

... the lights even appear to dim, flickering...

THE KID
Have you ever walked out of a
movie?

SAM
What.

THE KID
Have you ever walked out of a
movie?

SAM
Sure. Few times. Why do you --

THE KID
And how many times have you
switched off something at home?
Looked for something else?

Sam considers this.

THE KID
The greatest lie we've propagated
to audiences is that they want
control.

(beat)

Except control isn't a luxury, but
a trap. A trap to keep you
constantly dissatisfied, always
looking over your shoulder for
what's next, for what's better.

(beat)

You know what killed the movies?
It wasn't the superhero genre, a
public emergency, or online porn.
It was giving an audience the
ability to decide when to hit
PLAY... and when to hit NEXT.

WHOOSH! The normal restaurant flow returns. Sam takes it in,
visibly disturbed.

THE KID
No one wants that power. It's a
delusion. A lie. What people
really want is to pay the price,
drop their guard, fall to their
goddamn knees -- and surrender.

And like the kiss of death, the Kid places a hand on Sam's
shoulder, leans in, and whispers his final:

THE KID
Surrender.

CUE MUSIC: THE ANIMAL'S 'HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN'

INT. BMW - HIGHWAY 405 - MORNING

A man at the wheel, a man in control. 'The Animals' on the RADIO. A DIAL-TONE ringing.

Sam fists the HORN and the car BEEPS. Through the windshield, we register bumper-to-bumper LA traffic. We're not moving. But the LINE picks up:

AMY (O.C.)

Hi, Dad.

SAM

Hey, honey. You're still home?

AMY (O.C.)

Yeah, Derek's taking forever.

DEREK (O.C.)

I said I'm fucking coming!

Sam grimaces.

SAM

All's good, kiddo?

INT. KITCHEN - THE FELDSTEIN MANSION - BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING

AMY

I'm ovulating.

SAM

... oh?

AMY (12), Sam's daughter, inspects herself in front of a mirror, landline to her ear. Chubby, youthful, probably picked on.

AMY

Did God give me thick bones?

SAM

What?

AMY

Mom said I have thick bones, that it's genetic, and that there's nothing to do about it.

SAM
Your mother says a lot of crazy
shit. Can you put her on, Amy?

AMY
She said she doesn't want to speak
to you.

INTERCUT BETWEEN BMW AND KITCHEN

SAM
Well, can you tell her it's
urgent. Please?

AMY
Mom, he said it's urgent and
please.

YELLING offscreen, followed by RUSTLING from the phone, voices
inaudible.

AMY
She said her team left six
voicemails to your office and that
she'll see you at counseling.

Sam's face falls.

**INT. KITCHEN - THE FELDSTEIN MANSION - BEVERLY HILLS -
MORNING**

Amy clocks DEREK (10), Sam's son, at the base of the stairs in
in a Slim Shady bandana, backpack over his shoulder.

DEREK
... let's boogie.

AMY
Birthday boy has landed. We gotta
go.

Sam reacts -- the day totally slipped his mind. The car inches
forward.

SAM
Right -- well, can you put him on
so I can --

AMY
Derek, Dad says happy birthday.

SAM
Amy, I'm asking you to --

AMY
 Sorry Dad, Lance is at the door.
 We're going to be late for school.

Sam's face sours.

SAM
 Lance is driving you to school
 now?

AMY
 Yuh - huh.

Amy turns to register a bald man by the door. Must be LANCE
 (40s).

SAM
 Amy, I need you to put your mother
 on. Now.

AMY
 No can do, Pa. I'll see you at
 Derek's party tonight.

Sam tenses. *What party?*

SAM
 Amy, I'm not going to ask you
 again --

KKKKK -- the line drops.

SAM
 Fuck.

BEEEEEEP! A CAR HORN behind BLARES. Sam shoots up the bird.

SAM
 FUCK OFF!

EXT. ACROSS LOS ANGELES - MORNING

A BLACK CROW launches from its branch.

SNAPSHOTS OF LA are INTERCUT with Sam's drive: TOURISTS posing
 for photos in Griffith Park. Pursed lips and PEACE signs.

EXT. BMW -- SUNSET AVENUE - MORNING

Sam cruises down Sunset, passing under a towering CAPTAIN QUEER
 BILLBOARD: Rocky Jones, as the title character, floats under a
 rainbow holding a 747 plane with sheer might against a
 thunderous sky. The tagline reads:

THE GREATER THE STORM -- THE BRIGHTER THE RAINBOW.

The BLACK CROW whisks past.

EXT. ACROSS LOS ANGELES - MORNING

SNAPSHOTS: Camps of homeless tents under BRIDGES. Rats rummage for food. BROS smack asses on GOLF COURSES. Meanwhile, across tables citywide, hands shake, veneers flare, eyes squint. Wolfish.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - MORNING

A WALK OF FAME star glistens in the cement: Sam Feldstein. A looming shadow foreshadows the arrival of -- *SPLAT!* A dollop of wet BIRD SHIT on his name.

EXT. SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - BURBANK - MORNING

Sam peels into the Burbank lot under the SILVERHEAD STUDIOS archway, emblazoned with its trademark SPIRAL logo, as 'House of the Rising Sun' concludes.

EXT. SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - THE LOT - MORNING - MOMENTS LATER

BAM! Sam SLAMS the car door shut with his signature leather briefcase over his shoulder.

STEPHANIE (25) joins at his side, hands him a THERMOS of coffee to sip. They walk and talk through the LOT:

STEPHANIE
How'd it go?

SAM
Pretentious. Fuckin' brat. Thinks he knows it all.

STEPHANIE
Can't say I'm surprised, this town's been sucking him dry. You want me to read?

SAM
No, fuck him and his reps. Delete the submission. I don't want to see or read a word of his as long as I work in this town. Copy?

STEPHANIE
Consider him blacklisted.

SAM
Great. Walk me through my morning.

They move down the AVENUE of the studio lot, away from a hanger holding a massive poster of a COWBOY in Silverhead's early 00's OSCAR WINNER, a Western, *The End of Men*.

STEPHANIE

You've got Harry and Dan's *Rock* pitch in the boardroom at eleven.

SAM

Thrilling.

STEPHANIE

Need to keep it quick, cause you've got counseling with Nina in Venice at noon. So it might be a tight squeeze.

SAM

Can we push?

STEPHANIE

Harry and Dan?

SAM

No. Nina.

STEPHANIE

I'm not sure we can push this one, Sam. Divorce attorneys left six voicemails this morning. Even for them, that's a bit... much.

SAM

What do they want?

STEPHANIE

Well, first, they insist you're at counseling, or they'll take it as further evidence of your lack of commitment to the kids. Their words, not mine.

SAM

You did manage to send something over for --

STEPHANIE

Derek's birthday? Of course.

INT. LOBBY - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - MORNING - CONT.

SAM

What did we --

STEPHANIE

Lego kit. Pirate land. It's pool friendly, you build it underwater --

SAM

Thank you for arranging that.

STEPHANIE

You bet.

More Silverhead POSTERS are on the walls in the lobby -- the hit medical TV drama *The Duke of Scrubs*, another desert landscape from *The End of Men*, that vibrant RAINBOW CAPE from *Captain Queer*.

Employees bustle about, cop glances at Sam as he passes. Man of the hour.

SAM

Amy mentioned something about a party tonight? What's she talking about?

STEPHANIE

Hm -- I'm not -- no, I don't have that. Is it possible Nina didn't send over the --

SAM

Yes. It's possible. A *tactic*. To turn them on me. She damn well knows we have the premiere. I'm telling you, this woman is sick.

STEPHANIE

Well, Sam, that's just the half of it.

SAM

Why?

STEPHANIE

Well -- in the voicemails, they -- they have an ask. New ask.

SAM

Fuckin' hell. What is it now?

STEPHANIE

They think it's you. Over Natalie.

Sam stops. Stephanie too.

STEPHANIE
... for the top job.

SAM
What did they say?

Sam proceeds. Stephanie follows.

STEPHANIE
I mean, the whole town is talking,
Sam. Everyone knows it's you.
Nina's lawyers think you're about
to hit some huge payout and --

SAM
They want to reopen the
settlement.

STEPHANIE
... unfortunately.

SAM
This woman's going to kill me.

STEPHANIE
You and me both.

**INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - MOMENTS
LATER**

DING! The ELEVATOR opens. Sam gestures Stephanie to exit first
and he follows.

More EXECUTIVES move about, tension in the air. Sam moves past
cubicles towards his office. Sam's personal lawyer and all-
around fixer, ZEV (50), joins at his side.

ZEV
Morning, bud.

SAM
You hear about Nina?

ZEV
Already on it, pal. Letter's out
to her firm, threatening to sue
for breach of contract, lack of
due diligence. Your career
position was well known to all
parties when we settled.

SAM
Appreciate it, buddy.

ZEV

And fine, she wants to reopen?
We'll take the house -- and
Chanukah.

The Head of PR, Amanda (50) joins at their side:

AMANDA

Fuck the critics, Sam.

SAM

What are we at now?

AMANDA

63, last I checked.

SAM

We were at 75, like, an hour ago,
Amanda...

AMANDA

I don't know what to tell you.
Middle America slept in. Past the
embargo lift in New York.

SAM

How many total?

AMANDA

Eighty four critics. So we've got
room to play with, but we need a
tide shift. And fast.

Sam rounds the corner and *that's* when he sees him --

ROCKY JONES (28), a Midwestern pretty boy like the second-
coming of Montgomery Clift, sitting by the door of Sam's
office. *Uninvited*. Looks like he hasn't slept a wink.

ROCKY

You're hard to reach.

Sam's SECOND ASSISTANT, JOSH (22) rises from his desk behind,
silently panicked. Not his doing.

SAM

And you're on every billboard in
the city. To what do I owe the
pleasure?

ROCKY

You've been screening my calls.
This was the only way.

SAM
I had to suffer through breakfast
with your friend.

ROCKY
There are no friends in this
business. But you already know
that, don't you Sammy?

Rocky enters Sam's office. Sam gives Stephanie a look, then
Josh a death stare.

**INT. SAM'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - MORNING -
CONT.**

BAM. Sam shuts the door. Rocky walks around the space, takes in
its details.

SAM
You can't show up like that,
Rocky.

ROCKY
But I just did. Crazy, I've never
been in here.

Sam's office is a type-A shrine: neat files, a paper SHREDDER,
color-coded books, earlier family photos. One on his desk
features the four of them -- Sam, Nina, Amy & Derek -- smiling
wide in front of a WATERFALL.

Rocky plants himself on the couch.

ROCKY
Should I check for stains?
Wouldn't want to know what's
happened here.

SAM
What do you want, Rocky. Today's
not the day.

ROCKY
Fine. I'd like to know if you
think I'm a dead fish.

Rocky pulls out his phone, reads.

ROCKY
"'There's no one flying the
plane!'"
(MORE)

ROCKY (CONT'D)

(beat)

It's the opening line of *Captain Queer*, and a telling one too. While the film can be commended for being an unapologetically queer addition to this well-tread genre..."

SAM

Love that.

ROCKY

"... it's a shame then, that the powers that be, placed the burden of this estimated \$200-million budgeted franchise launcher on the shoulders of former child star Rocky Jones."

Sam's face falls.

ROCKY

"Sure, those shoulders are broad, and of course, he's easy on the eyes. Too bad his own are dead. No one's flying the plane up there."

SAM

... you can't read this shit.

But Sam pulls out his phone anyway. Refreshes the review page from earlier, where his 66 becomes a --

57. The critics have spoken -- this film is rotten. Sam pales, pockets his phone.

ROCKY

"A sad sight to behold. Yet another teen heartthrob fallen sick with a bout of 'dead fish syndrome'. Do you know what that is, Sam? Do you know where the phrase comes from?"

SAM

Enlighten me.

ROCKY

It's when a hot girl can't fuck cause she hasn't had to work for a thing in her life. Lies in bed like a dead fish. Like a foul dead fish! Do they think I've had it easy?

SAM
No -- they think you're a pretty
face!

Ouch -- Sam clocks that pretty face crumpling.

SAM
... but -- they're wrong, Rocky.
And that's only one opinion
anyways.

ROCKY
Do you think I could act?

A beat. Sam blushes, fights a nervous smile.

SAM
Rocky, I -- do you think I would
have cast you if you couldn't?

ROCKY
I'm still not sure why you casted
me.

SAM
Because it's the role you were
born to play. You ARE Captain
Queer!

ROCKY
Yeah, and that's all I'll ever be
now. Captain Rainbow Faggot.
They'll carve it on my tombstone.

SAM
Rocky...

Rocky lifts his phone to read more.

ROCKY
"Rocky Jones is about as
convincing as a superhero as a
straight man in gay porn. Can't
fake an erection like you can't
fake talent!"

SAM
What do you want, Rocky?

ROCKY
I want my next role.

A loaded beat. That landed. Sam shifts, uncomfortable.

ROCKY
Something meaty. Something I can
really sink my teeth into. I need
my *Fighter* to Bale's Batman.

SAM
... I could do that.

ROCKY
Well, I'm afraid I don't believe
you. Because you haven't, and it's
not the first time I've asked.

SAM
(whispers)
Rock -- I'm about to take over
this whole damn studio. Whatever
you want, consider it done. Just
give me a little time.

ROCKY
I don't have time.

SAM
Rocky, after this weekend you'll
have pick of the litter. You know
how many doors this is about to
open?

ROCKY
I'm not giving you the weekend.
Because if this thing flops, come
Monday morning, I'd be lucky to
book a CW role.
(then)
I'll give you the day.

Sam tenses.

ROCKY
And if you don't bring me
something juicy... I'm talking
AIDS, skeletal bones, eat an apple
a day for a year juicy? Then I go
public. *About us.*

Sam freezes.

ROCKY
All of it. The Italy trip, handies
in the trailer, splooging on the
spandex. Every. Last. Drop.

SAM
I don't believe you.

ROCKY

Watch me.

SAM

You think you're booking AIDS after that? No one would take you seriously.

ROCKY

Have you read these reviews, Sam? I've got nothing to lose, cause no one's taking me seriously now. But by the end of the day, mark my words -- they will.

Rocky, resolute, locks his eyes on Sam. The door *KNOCK KNOCKS*, cracks open. *Stephanie*.

STEPHANIE

Sorry, Sam. I've got Hornsby.

Rocky stands and then so does Sam. Sam holds out a hand, firm, and drops his voice, masculine:

SAM

See you on the red carpet tonight, buddy.

Buddy. Rocky notices the facade return, knowing this shift in Sam well. He meets Sam's hand, just as firm, with steadfast eyes.

ROCKY

Glad we can still reach a mutual agreement.

They shake, loaded tension. There's history here.

Then Rocky goes for the door and disappears around the corner.

STEPHANIE

You good?

Sam doesn't respond.

STEPHANIE

Natalie's in there now. He wants you next.

(beat)

I think this is it, boss.

INT. CEO WAITING ROOM - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE MORNING

A bouncing knee. Sam eyes Hornsby's closed door, muffled talk within finishing up. He steels himself, ready to claim his rightful place on the throne.

But then the door cracks open, and out comes Natalie... beaming from ear to ear. Sam's face turns. She flashes a smile.

NATALIE

How was breakfast, Sammy?

SAM

Just fine, Natalie. You?

NATALIE

The Benedict there is off the charts good, bro.

Huh. Sam takes that in, puzzled as JIM HORNSBY (75), the retiring CEO of Silverhead Global, appears at the open door.

HORNSBY

Sam. Come on in.

INT. HORNSBY'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE MORNING

Half a dozen Oscars are on the shelves. Photos of Hornsby and Meryl, Hornsby and Stallone, Hornsby and Denzel. This room reeks of accomplishment.

HORNSBY

Please, sit.

Sam sits. Hornsby closes the door, takes a seat across. Sam's office view pales in comparison to this; Hornsby's window offers a Hollywood vista that feels like a box seat in heaven.

HORNSBY

How's Nina?

SAM

Oh, good.

HORNSBY

And the kids?

SAM

Good, everyone's good.

HORNSBY

Oh, good. Family's the most important thing, ya?

SAM

Oh, of course.

HORNSBY

Good, well, good. Let's begin then, hrm?

SAM

Please.

HORNSBY

I'll start by saying we really appreciate what you've done with *Captain*, Sam. Whatever happens this weekend, I'm proud to say, it's more than a movie, you know? It's a piece of history!

Sam braces for what's next.

HORNSBY

Unfortunately -- I regret to inform you -- but the Board is leaning in a different direction, regarding my successor.

Sam's soul cracks a little.

HORNSBY

We recognize and greatly value your contributions to Theatrical for the past two decades, but the Board believes our future might be better secured by someone firmly rooted in the Television and Direct-to-Consumer business to steer us through these seismic industry changes.

SAM

Right.

HORNSBY

Natalie knows tech, Natalie knows tomorrow.

SAM

I mean, I know tomorrow...

HORNSBY

Sure, you have great taste, and can make the critics swoon -- on a good day.

(beat)

But Natalie knows how to leverage that IP cross-platform. Look, the business is changing fast, my friend. We need to stay ahead of it if we're going to survive.

SAM

But that's not who we are, Jim. Silverhead is built on the legacy of our past. 'The End of Men'. *Prestige*.

HORNSBY

You know as well as I do that Silverhead is built on syndicated royalties from the *The Duke of Scrubs*.

(beat)

And if Natalie hadn't greenlit *Duke*, we would have gone under a decade ago.

SAM

Duke doesn't bring talent through the door.

HORNSBY

Maybe not. But it sure keeps the lights on.

Sam leans forward.

SAM

Sorry, Jim, just, help me understand. I don't mean to speak out of turn, it's just -- well, respectfully -- I know what we stand for, and what we don't. And I hate to say it, but -- I see you making a serious mistake here.

Hornsby's eyes shift, insulted.

SAM

She could fire the entire team and assign a *bot* to build our slate!

HORNSBY
If that's the future, then, so be
it.

Sam sinks back into his chair, defeated.

HORNSBY
You've seen the Bulge, ya?

SAM
What.

HORNSBY
Stand up.

SAM
... Jim.

HORNSBY
Stand!

Sam stands, annoyed, as Hornsby pulls out his smartphone. *DING!*
He's recording a VIDEO. Sam pleads --

SAM
This isn't us, Jim.

DING! Sam sits, as Hornsby leans across the table to show the
VIDEO he just recorded, now augmented with an auspicious --

HORNSBY
Look at that thing!

-- [VIDEO] can't-miss-Bulge in the nether region.

SAM (REPEATED ON VIDEO)
This isn't us, Jim.

HORNSBY
Holland doesn't have that bulge.
Pattinson, Mackie, Corenswet --
they wish they had that bulge.

SAM
So she knows how to make a filter.
Genius.

HORNSBY
That filter has us trending in
thirty-four countries, Sam. The
Japanese? They're losing their
goddamn minds about it, screaming
on the streets about the Bulge.

SAM

It's a fad, Jim. We don't run this company on fads.

HORNSBY

We run this company on hits!

SAM

Right -- and this movie's *my* hit!

HORNSBY

No. This movie's your bomb.

That lands.

HORNSBY

Captain's tracking at an opening weekend of, what? A hundred global? With the best multiple we're looking at a two, three hundred *million* dollar loss, and we're not getting that multiple with *these* reviews. Without the Bulge you might as well double those losses.

Sam takes in the corner office. So close, yet so far.

HORNSBY

Look, I'm proud of the film. My nephew is gay. You should be proud of what you've done for their community. It's important.

Sam holds back.

HORNSBY

And maybe if momentum on *Captain* was positive, we'd be having a different conversation. But this movie is going to bomb, barring some unforeseen miracle from God.

A miracle... Sam considers that.

HORNSBY

Maybe this one just wasn't meant to be, my friend. Take a victory lap, sail the Maldives with Nina. Spend some time with your family. At the end of the day, that's what matters.

SAM

Your decision is final?

HORNSBY

Look, nothing's final until it's final, but I felt I owed you an update on where we're at before people start to yap.

SAM

Thank you for letting me know.

Sam stands. They shake, quick, before Sam goes for the door.

HORNSBY

Send my regards to Nina and the kids!

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE MORNING

Sam sulks through the office. On Zev, Amanda, Josh, gazing off vacantly. Dread palpable in the air.

Meanwhile, inside her glass office, Natalie's POPPING morning champagne with her assists.

INT. SAM'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - MOMENTS LATER

Sam sits at his desk, numb. Stephanie appears at the door.

STEPHANIE

I'm so sorry, Sam.

SAM

Yeah, me too.

STEPHANIE

We'll get through this.

SAM

No. She's going to clear house. It'll be brutal, Stephanie. Red wedding brutal.

STEPHANIE

Then I'll follow you wherever you go next. Hornsby's an idiot. I'm sure he'll regret this.

SAM

... keep it on the down low for now?

STEPHANIE

Of course. I'll give you a moment.

Stephanie shuts the door. Sam leans back into his chair. He falls silent for a moment before --

WHAM! The man EXPLODES, sending the objects off his desk flying. Voices outside his door go quiet.

A shattered #1 DAD! mug wobbles on the floor.

Sam settles, embarrassed. Covers his face. A long beat.

Then he removes his hands, opens his eyes, and that's when...

He sees it.

Sitting at the center of his desk -- is a printed movie script. Pristine white pages, fresh off the press, it begs a closer look...

So Sam leans forward to read its cover page --

SPOILER
by THE KID

SAM
What the --

He grabs the thing --

SAM
FUCKIN' PRICK!

-- and throws it in the trash.

SAM
STEPHANIE?!

The door POPS open.

STEPHANIE
What's wrong?

SAM
I told you I never want to see his fuckin' name again.

STEPHANIE
Who?

SAM
The Kid. His fuckin' script was sitting on my desk. Did you put it there?

STEPHANIE
No, of course not.

SAM

Well someone just took a giant
shit on my desk then.

STEPHANIE

It wasn't me, Sam.

SAM

Find out who did. And fire them.

STEPHANIE

Sam...

SAM

GO.

Stephanie, slighted, backtracks out the door, shuts it. Sam
sits in the silence. A beat.

He looks back to the trash. The white pages are practically
glistening in the sunlight...

Okay, fine... he's a little curious...

And so he lifts the script out of the trash and plops it on to
his desk.

SPOILER
by THE KID

He flips to the first page and sees a --

WARNING: FOR YOUR EYES ONLY message. For readers other than Sam
-- **CONSEQUENCES WILL BE DIRE.**

He scoffs at this.

SAM

Pompous shit.

Sam flips to the next page. We see flashes of text from the
script itself [as indicated with *ITALICS*].

A variety of CHOICES are on the breakfast MENU.

SERVER (O.C.)

Mr. Feldstein?

*The menu lowers to REVEAL SAM FELDSTEIN (late 40s), sleek in a
tailored suit highlighting his fit frame.*

SERVER

*Can I get something started for
you?*

Sam goes still. Huh? He flips forward.

SAM
I went with the egg-white
Frittata.

THE KID
Well, I'm not sure you had a
choice in the matter.

What the hell is this? Sam looks up, rattled. How is this possible? He flips the page.

SAM
Hey, that's the job. Staying
ahead. Gotta know what's next.

THE KID
And that's why you're taking over
for the dinosaur.

FLIP. Sam's eyes dart from side to side, reading in terror.

THE KID
Is it possible to escape our fate
-- and if not -- what meaning is
there to be found in a life so
scripted?

Sam shuts the script.

SAM
STEPHANIE!

No one comes.

SAM
STEPHANIE!

The door cracks open. It's Josh, the 2nd Assist.

JOSH
Everything okay?

SAM
I don't want you.

JOSH
Sorry Sam. Steph just stepped out.

SAM
Get her back.

JOSH
On it.

Josh closes the door.

Sam looks back to the script and skims through, panicked -- through breakfast, down the studio lot with Stephanie, Rocky in his office...

ROCKY
I'd like to know if you think I'm
a dead fish.

... Hornsby breaking the bad news...

HORNSBY
Maybe this just wasn't meant to
be.

... SPOILER sitting on his desk... until he lands on --

This.

You land on this.

And this might be as good a time as ever to say...

Hello there, Sam! Do I have your attention now?

Sam shoots up from his seat, horrified. He pulls back, paces the room.

SAM
WHAT THE FUCKING FUCK!

Sam takes a beat. Then, a thought.

So he scurries back to the script to see his *fucking fuck* line printed on Page 31 above, which brings a slew of --

SAM
FUCK!

SAM
FUCK!

SAM
HOLY FUCK!

SAM
HOLY FUCK!

SAM
WHAT IN THE ACTUAL FLYING
FUCK!

SAM
WHAT IN THE ACTUAL FLYING
FUCK!

Sam glimpses the next line before it happens, and so he turns to the door.

It opens.

STEPHANIE
What's wrong?

SAM
Someone's drugged me.

What? STEPHANIE

SAM
In the coffee, did you drug me?

STEPHANIE
Sam, what are you talking about?

Sam looks back to the page. He glimpses her next line and mumbles it with her...

STEPHANIE
You're scaring me.

SAM
You're scaring me?

Sam settles the script, pulls back.

What? STEPHANIE

SAM
Shut the door.

BAM. She shuts the door. He continues pacing, distraught.

STEPHANIE
Harry and Dan are on their way up
to the boardroom.

SAM
No, I can't right now. I've been
drugged.

STEPHANIE
Why would someone drug you?

A thought comes to him.

SAM
Natalie... I bet it was fuckin'
Natalie! She knows we have a smash
and wants me dead!

STEPHANIE
Do you need medical care, Sam?

Looking to the THERMOS still on his desk:

SAM
Where did the coffee come from?

STEPHANIE
... the kitchen?

SAM
Who made it?

STEPHANIE
I did. Sam, I think you may need
to see a doctor. You may be having
a stroke, or --

SAM
Fuck no.

STEPHANIE
Hey -- you can't speak to me that
way. I know it's been a shitty
morning, but please don't --

SAM
Sorry.

STEPHANIE
Just tell me what happened and
I'll fix it.

SAM
It's The Kid. It's the FUCKING
Kid!

STEPHANIE
I'm sorry Sam, I don't know who
put the script on your desk. But
I'm getting to the bottom of it, I
promise.

SAM
This can't be happening.

STEPHANIE
Tell me what's happening.

SAM
Have you read it?

STEPHANIE
No, you told me not to, per our
conversation earlier --

SAM
Read it.

STEPHANIE
Now you want me to read it?

SAM
Yes. Now. Read it now.
(then, softening)
Please.

Stephanie approaches his desk, apprehensive. She leans in, flips back to the beginning...

... clocks the **FOR YOUR EYES ONLY WARNING** message.

STEPHANIE
Who does he think he is?

SAM
God. Keep reading.

Stephanie flips forward. It takes her a moment before she realizes...

STEPHANIE
... oh. *Shit.*

SAM
Mhm.

STEPHANIE
He needs consent to use your likeness -- I'll have Zev file a cease and desist immediately -- he can't take this out without changing the ---

SAM
Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait -- there's more. Keep going. *You're in it too.*

Her face sinks.

SAM
Page thirteen, fourteen. Something like that. *Look.*

Stephanie skims ahead before finding it.

Then she goes still.

STEPHANIE
I don't understand.

SAM
Neither do I, Stephanie! Neither do fucking I!

Stephanie keeps flipping the pages... 31.. 33... into 35...

SAM
You see it now?

Sam takes her in. *But Stephanie doesn't react. Her eyes stay transfixed on the page, like she'd seen into the face of Hell.*

SAM
Steph?

She remains disconcertingly still, hunched over the desk. And that's when Sam notices...

... a single droplet of blood from her nose...

Sam goes white, as the droplet --

HITS THE PAGE.

SAM
STEPHANIE?!

He rushes to her side, grazes her shoulder -- which sends her *crumpling into the desk, hard.*

SAM
FUCK!

She topples over, HITS the ground with a brutal CRACK.

SAM
FUCKING FUCK.

Sam panics. Kneels to her body.

SAM
Hey, hey, Steph. Come on, hey.

He shakes her, distraught. Blood coats the open script...

His mind is reeling, his fingers bloodied. He flips back to the beginning and rereads the WARNING message --

CONSEQUENCES WILL BE DIRE.

KNOCK KNOCK -- at the door. Sam shoots up, alert.

SAM
ONE SECOND!

He looks back to Stephanie, feels for a pulse. *Nothing.*

JOSH (O.S.)
Sam, I've got Harry and Dan.

Sam, in a daze, takes in the room. What does he do next? He looks back to her body, at a loss. If only someone had the answers...

... then he looks back to the script. An idea. A most terrible idea.

He skims a few lines down to know what to do...

JOSH (O.S.)
Everyone's in the boardroom.
They're waiting on you.

SAM
I'll be out in a minute!

Josh goes quiet. Sam shakes his head in disbelief, before dropping an embittered --

SAM
Fuck.

And so he grabs Stephanie by the hands and drags her limp corpse across the floor...

INT. BATHROOM - SAM'S OFFICE - LATE MORNING - CONT.

... into the BATHROOM and onto... the TOILET.

Her bloodshot eyes, devoid of life, bore into him. Disturbed, he turns away, can't face her.

SCREECH! Sam's hands attack the sink, scrubbing till raw. Her blood spirals the drain. SQUEAK! He pats his hands dry.

Sam looks to his reflection: a sweaty, disheveled mess. Unthinkable for him. He does his top button. Attempts a smile. Weak.

NATALIE (PRELAP)
Sam.

He startles, looks up. *Did he just hear that Prelap?*

NATALIE (PRELAP)
Pleasure for you to join us.

INT. BOARDROOM - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE MORNING - CONT.

WHOO! Sam drops into a seat. He felt that CUT.

He surveys the boardroom -- everyone is here. Natalie, Amanda, Zev, Josh, and a medley of other suits encircle the long table.

HARRY (38) and DAN (38) stand before a slideshow screen prepared to toggle through a pitch.

Hey Sam! DAN Hey Sam! HARRY

Uh, hey, boys... SAM

Sam, flustered, reads the room. He clocks the briefcase strapped around his shoulder. *SPOILER's* inside.

SAM
Sorry I'm late.
(all eyes on him)
Please, please. Let's begin.

Harry and Dan share a glance. Sam settles into his seat. Undoes his top button. Feigns confidence. Natalie keeps watching him.

DAN
Okay. Buckle up for... an action
thriller set on the high seas with
higher stakes... starring --
Dwayne The Rock Johnson in... The
Bourne Identity meets... The
Poseidon Adventure.

Sam looks to the script in his briefcase.

DAN
So. We open on Johnson, waking up
in some cellar, strapped to some
pipe. No idea how he got there, no
idea who he is...

Annoyed, he decides to fuck with them a bit, and so...

DAN
He breaks free, sweating bricks,
scrambling around, busts through
the door and --

HARRY
He's on a cruise ship.

... he removes the script discreetly...

DAN (O.C.)
This is -- a Miami-based,
Jamaican-bound, all-you-can-eat
cruise line, with sun-caked
Floridian snowbirds --

... flips to Page 38...

DAN (O.C.)
 -- Latin-X influencers --

... and locates these very lines, before --

DAN (O.C.)	SAM
-- and failed contestants	-- and failed contestants
fresh off American Idol in	fresh off American Idol in
the nightly musical.	the nightly musical?

The room, impressed, turns to look at Sam.

SAM
 Please, please, continue.

Dan and Harry trade a nervous look.

DAN
 So, um. Amidst all the hoopla and
 drunken seaside shenanigans, from
 bow to stern, port to starboard,
 little do these passengers know --

DAN	SAM
They're headed for an	THEY'E HEADED FOR AN ICEBERG!
iceberg.	

The room chuckles. Natalie doesn't. Dan and Harry are thrown off.

SAM
 Excuse me. I'm sorry. Please,
 please continue.

Some snickers ensue.

HARRY
 So. Top of the first act, BAM!
 We've got impact, and this ship's
 going down.

Sam takes that in... *is his ship going down too?*

And so as the boys continue, Sam starts skipping through
SPOILER'S pages...

HARRY (O.C.)
 And so... against the clock, with
 thousands of lives on the line,
 the only one who can save them is
 --

DAN (O.C.)
 ... Dwayne The Rock Johnson.
 (MORE)

DAN (O.C.) (CONT'D)
 Problem is, Johnson's memory's
 been wiped, and he isn't aware
 that he's a ruthless assassin with
 a violent past --

... headed straight for the ending...

HARRY (O.C.)
 -- holding a key thumb drive with
 the world's most confidential
 intel.

... page numbers BLAZING by...

HARRY (O.C.)
 Worst still, he's not the only
 killer on this sinking ship, and
 all of them want that drive before
 the vessel goes belly up.

... until he reaches the FINAL PAGE, 110. He snaps back with a:

SAM
 Nailed it, boys.

Dan and Harry shuffle, uncomfortable. Sam refocuses on the page
 before him...

DAN (O.C.)
 Erm. Yeah, but -- in order for him
 to save the ship from utter
 disaster, he'll need to accept his
 true identity --

... to clock the very final lines of the script, the ultimate
 spoiler...

DAN (O.C.)
 -- before time is out.

*And in the final moments of his life, just seconds before he
 will cease to exist for all eternity, Sam stands alone against
 an audience erupting with applause. Recognizing this moment, he
 waves back... and manages to crack a smile.*

CUT TO BLACK

Smile, he does not. Sam slams the script shut, unnerved. Others
 notice it.

NATALIE
 I'm sorry, Sam -- are you still
 with us?

Sam stares off into space. A CLOCK on the wall -- *TICK... TICK... TICKS...*

AMANDA

... Sam?

TICK... TICK... TICK... Sam perks up to Amanda. She gives him eyes -- *what the hell are you doing?*

DAN

Should we reschedule? Or --

NATALIE

I think that's a good idea. It appears Sam here has had quite the morning...

SAM

Reschedule? So you can waste more of my time?

The room felt that.

SAM

Why are we here?

DAN

What?

SAM

If I die tonight -- and this is the last pitch I'll ever hear, please, help me understand. Why should I give a single fuck about this film?

DAN

I'm not sure how to answer that --

SAM

Precisely.

HARRY

... well. If I may -- I'd like to think it's an interesting take on the disaster film.

SAM

Why Harrison. Tell me. Why is it interesting?

HARRY

I mean... we're playing against expectations here.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

You know the ship is going down...
it's not a question of if, it's a
question of --

SAM

When?

DAN

No... who?

Sam scowls, and flips back to Page 41 to correct course:

DAN

Who will he be at the moment of
crisis, when all is lost? Will he
accept himself, on the brink of
disaster, or will he --

DAN

Succumb to the pitfalls of
self delusion and hurt those
closest to him?

SAM

Succumb to the pitfalls of
self delusion and hurt those
closest to him...

Shit. Dan dips his head, embarrassed. Harry looks to him like
he's an utter idiot. Sam shuts the script and holds out a
finger.

SAM

Listen to me carefully.

He commands the attention of every suit in the room, even
Natalie now.

SAM

You could do anything. You could
write anything, anyone -- and I
know you think times are tough
because you're as white as my ass
cheeks on your Jamaican-bound
cruise line, but you gentlemen,
are *free*.

Harry and Dan stand aghast. No one's ever dared talk to these
Caucasian princes like this before.

SAM

You are the Gods of your own
playground, with the canvas of
infinity at your fingertips, but
you must have balls like peanuts
to give me second-rate Titanic
with Dwayne, the Rock, fucking
Johnson?

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)
 I mean, for the love of fucking
 God, show me something I haven't
 seen before, show me --

INT/EXT. BMW -- SANTA MONICA FREEWAY - DAY -- CONT.

SAM
 -- WHAT'S NEXT!

And on the CUT, Sam's suddenly behind the wheel of his BMW on
 an ACTIVE FREEWAY. Fuck.

VROOM! Cars whiz past like speeding BULLETS! VROOM! By the time
 he registers his new setting it's too late --

He's hurtling towards the rear of a shiny PORSCHE stopped up
 ahead.

SAM
 FUCK!

Sam SLAMS the BRAKES and skids to a screeching --

BAM! Impact. **BOOM!** Another CRASH from behind.

He steadies his grip against the wheel as the BLOWS pile on....
 while his eyes stray to the passenger seat...

... where SPOILER sits, jutting out of his briefcase...

HOLD on Sam amidst WRENCHING STEEL, CAR HORNS BLARING, and
 AIRBAGS EXPLODING.

It's anarchy out there.

In time, the dust settles, and Sam looks up to clock the scene
 -- *gridlock*, like a clot in LA's circulation.

He POPS the belt, cracks the door, falls outside. The CAR ALARM
 fires off.

EXT. SANTA MONICA FREEWAY - DAY - CONT.

Black smoke, blue sky. Metal wreckage under the blinding sun...

Wait, he forgot something. Sam leans back into the car,
snatches his briefcase, irritated.

He surveys the scene, disoriented. A SIREN fades into his
 senses... *WEEO... WEEO... WEEO...*

AAAAAAHHHHHHHH! A WOMAN'S SCREAM pierces the air, blood-curdling. He winces at the sound of it. His HEAD THROBS in sync with BLURRED VISION, POUNDING. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Panic grips him. He staggers through a maze of burnt metal and smoking rubber. In the far-off haze, the GLOWING LIGHTS of EMERGENCY VEHICLES approach...

To his side, he spots an escape: an exit ramp *across* the freeway through traffic flowing in the *opposite* direction.

He stumbles into the median, steadies himself. Cars WHOOSH by in the free lane.

WHOOSH! The wind yanks at his briefcase, *FORCEFUL*, nearly takes him with it.

BAM! BAM! BAM! GUNSHOTS. Sam ducks for cover. CIVILIANS scatter, frenzied chaos, BABIES CRY. POP. POP. He needs to move, now. Delirious --

Sam VAULTS over the median! WHOOSH! A HORN BLASTS. Fuck, shit -- POP! POP! WEEO... WEEO...

WHOOSH! Now he's on a collision with cars too. He lunges forward. WHOOSH! Another car skids by, close call, nearly crushed like Frogger. The EXIT's just within reach, but then --

Hesitation grips Sam. If he remains put... maybe this nightmare will end...

BRAAAAAAAM! A TRUCK HORN detonates.

Sam spins, sees a Freight-liner barreling down... paralyzed by indecision, he locks eyes with his impending demise, before --

INT. COUNSELING OFFICE - VENICE - DAY

SAM (CONTINUED)
AAAHHHH ---

NINA
-- they ask me why he doesn't
try anymore --

Sam shoots up from a couch screaming! A beat, before we REVEAL --

HEATHER (70s), his New Age marriage counsellor, stunned in her leather armchair. But that's not all:

NINA (O.C.)
WHAT WAS THAT?!

Fuck. Sam's wife NINA (40), is sitting on the opposite end of the couch. Short hair, hourglass frame, altered skin by the needle of Beverly Hill's finest.

Sam takes in the room, silent.

SAM
Did I just get here?

NINA
WHAT?!

SAM
How long have I been here?

Nina and Heather exchange a look of concern.

SAM
Did you see me walk in?

NINA
What are you talking about?!

Sam reads the room. He sits back into the couch, reeling in the quiet.

A moment.

HEATHER
That was not appropriate, Sam.
Scream like that in here again and
I will end the session
immediately. Do you understand me?

Sam nods, registers the briefcase like a scarlet letter chained to his neck.

NINA
I knew he wasn't present, Heather.
You see this is the problem. He's
never present. This is why nothing
changes.

HEATHER
Sam -- care to explain your
reaction to what Nina said?

SAM
I don't know what Nina said.

NINA
Because you never listen.

SAM
I don't know what's happening to
me.

Sam breaks, more vulnerable than we've seen him:

SAM

I was in my office, and then... I was in the boardroom, and then the car, and now I'm here. I have no memory of the spaces in between. I can feel the cuts, Heather. I *feel* the cuts.

Heather takes a long beat. Cools the tension.

HEATHER

If I'm understanding correctly -- what you're saying -- is that it feels like time -- time is moving too fast?

SAM

Yes, but, it's more than that. It's like there *is* no time in between. It's like --
(considers this...)
It's like he's changing the station...

HEATHER

Who's changing the station, Sam?

SAM

I -- I don't know. I don't know.

HEATHER

Do you believe in God, Sam?

NINA

Yeah, himself.

Heather shoots her a glare. Then turns back to Sam. He takes his time with his reply.

SAM

I -- I don't know. I try not to think about it.

Heather waits for more from him.

SAM

I -- I'd like to believe there's more to this life than meets the eye. That there's a reason I'm here... and that when it's over -- when it's over... well -- maybe there's something after. Something... *beyond?*

Heather smiles, knowingly. She leans forward.

HEATHER

Are you familiar with the meaning
of the term 'meta', Sam?

A beat. Sam perks up to the question. Is she in on it?

SAM

I mean, sure? The industry's
obsessed with it. Why are you --

HEATHER

How would you define it?

SAM

It's when something... is about
itself.

Sam ponders this, connecting the dots...

SAM

It's about -- me...?

NINA

Not everything is about you, Sam.

HEATHER

Nina, please.

(turning back to Sam)

Sure, Sam -- meta's commonly a
prefix to ascribe self-reference
to a concept -- metadata,
metaphysics, metahumor, the list
goes on -- but the etymology of
the word is rather curious...

Sam perks up. Does The Kid want him to hear this?

HEATHER

In Hebrew, the word means *death*.
But in Latin, the word translates
to "after"... or, *beyond*.

Heather turns her head. Did it just get darker in here?

HEATHER

You said you'd hope there's
something beyond, Sam. Something
beyond -- *yourself*. What would you
hope that is?

Sam considers this. He clocks Nina watching him closely. Is
there a correct answer here?

SAM

Well -- I don't know. I -- well,
I'd hope my children will thrive,
beyond me.

NINA

Bullshit.

SAM

I do.

NINA

Our children? Really? You don't
give two shits about them, Sam.

SAM

Sure, Nina.

NINA

Your fuckin' assistant now sent
Derek the same gift two years in a
row!

Sam's eyes widen.

NINA

How do you think that makes him
feel?

SAM

... I'm sure you were pleased. You
want them to hate me.

NINA

Are you serious? The *last* thing I
want is for them to hate their
father -- but you make it too
easy.

SAM

You parade your bald eagle around
like a new pet. A pathetic attempt
to erase me, really. You think
they want Lance around?

NINA

I think they want you around, but
you can't even commit to your own
son's goddamn birthday party! I
mean --

SAM

You knew the premiere was tonight,
Nina. You knew, and you still --

NINA

Oh, fuck off, as if that made a difference. And leave Lance out of this -- I don't bring up who you're shtupping in the studio trailer.

SAM

... I'm not flaunting it in front of the kids.

NINA

You're not flaunting it for anyone! And I know you'd rather live in hiding for the rest of your life, but I can't do that anymore for you.

Sam takes that in.

SAM

You knew what you were signing up for with me, and it's not like you found out a decade in, alright?

NINA

Sure, Sam, I knew. But then I changed. And maybe you're not capable of that -- but I didn't want to live a lie anymore.

Sam's eyes stray to the window: a POLICE CAR is parked outside... *shit*.

NINA

You can stare at the truth of who you are as clear as day, and you still wouldn't believe it. And you'll spend a lifetime scrambling to learn what you could know now
--

He looks back to Nina.

NINA

There are some things outside of your control.

She smiles. *KNOCK KNOCK*. The door cracks open -- *TWO COPS*.

OFFICER #1

Sam Feldstein.

He goes stiff. Busted.

OFFICER #2
We'd like to ask you some
questions.

INT. HOLLYWOOD STATION - HOLDING CELLS - DAY

Fingers grip cold metal bars. Restless feet KICK the ground.

OFFICER #1 (PRELAP)
What was your last contact with
Stephanie Kaplan?

A PRISONER rattles his cage, teeth bared.

OFFICER #2 (PRELAP)
... Mr. Feldstein?

Sam makes eye contact, as he's escorted past in a daze.

TATTOOS are etched into prisoners' skin, bleeding. The Virgin Mary. A deranged Daffy Duck. Gang insignias.

SAM (V.O.)
... I can't feel my body.

A PRISONER's GROANING, guttural and disembodied, swells,
enveloping the cell...

OFFICER #1 (PRELAP)
Sir?

SAM (V.O.)
I don't have a --

... the GROAN rises, chilling and monstrous...

SAM (V.O.)
I can't feel my --

INT. HOLLYWOOD STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

SAM
Body.

The GROAN snaps to silence. Sam sits under a spotlight,
buzzing, heat searing.

Across, OFFICER #1 and #2 sit, skeptical, young. OFFICER #1
jots notes. Sam feels himself --

His briefcase is gone.

OFFICER #2
We'll return your personal objects
to you as soon as we're done here.

OFFICER #1
Your last contact with your
assistant, sir?

SAM
... Stephanie?

DING! A solitary PIANO NOTE lands, straight out of a noir film.
Sam reacts.

He heard that note.

SAM
Oh, sure.... ya, earlier. In my
office.

OFFICER #2
Witnesses suggest she was last
seen entering your office.

... DING DING DING DING....

SAM
I'm sorry, but do you hear that?

OFFICER #1
Hear what?

SAM
The music?

OFFICER #2
What music?

Sam considers this, curious.

OFFICER #2
Are you under the influence of any
substances, sir?

SAM
I don't know, I don't think so --

OFFICER #1
This is serious, Mr. Feldstein.
Your assistant is dead.

Sam feigns surprise.

SAM
... w - what?

CHIMES in the piano, questioning. Cops take him in.
They think they've got him.

SAM
Why? I, I mean -- how?

OFFICER #2
She was found on *your* toilet with
her eyes bled out.

OFFICER #1
Shitty way to croak.

STACCATO STRIKE!

SAM
Oh, God...

OFFICER #2
What'd you do to her, Sam?

A HIGH NOTE lingers with uncertainty...

OFFICER #1
You prey on young women, sir?

... the music seems to be beckoning him... Sam considers this.

SAM
No, I, I --

The TEMPO picks up: *DA DA, dadaduhduh. DA DA, dadaduhduh!*

The notes pulse with anticipation, climbing, as if nudging a
certain protagonist into bravery...

SAM
I, I...

The notes continue their climb...

Sam shakes his head with a disbelieving smile. What does The
Kid want him to do?

OFFICER #2
Do you think this is funny?

OFFICER #1
Are you some kind of sicko?

The music is reaching a FEVER PITCH, climbing to its peak just
as --

Sam's eyes shift -- and the MUSIC flatlines... before a --

SAM

Let me get this straight.

DA DA! A TRIUMPHANT pivot, rewarding his action.

Sam takes that in. Then he leans forward, pausing with each comma, for effect. A dormant spark rekindling...

SAM

You think, that in *these* times, a man, in my position, with *my* reputation -- as the top choice to lead a major Hollywood studio, that employs thousands of people in this economy, on the eve of the biggest premiere of my entire career, after a lifetime of generous donations to the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles and *this* very police force -- would decide, *suddenly*, on a Thursday morning, to become a *killer*, and murder my *female* assistant, in cold blood, and place her in the bathroom of my own office, on the fuckin' shitter?

The Officers wriggle with uncertainty.

SAM

You two look like you're trying to make a name for yourself in this town, so let me give you some unsolicited advice -- rule number one -- *never* bite the hand that feeds you because *this* town remembers and rule number two -- if you're going to take a shot? Don't. Fucking. Miss.

And with that, *Sam is back* as the EXIT swings open --

-- ZEV, to the rescue.

ZEV

The fuck is this?
(pointing to Sam)
You, up.

OFFICER #1

Hey, that's not your decision --

ZEV

I'm sorry -- who are you? Officer number one and officer number two? Pretty sure that's all you'll ever be. Speak to my client again without counsel present and you'll never work another day in your life.

Sam moves to the exit.

ZEV

Stephanie Kaplan died of a stroke while taking a piss in a bowl she shouldn't have been pissing in.

Sam register this.

ZEV

Coroner's report is final. Tragic, sure. Criminal? Good luck with that.

INT. ZEV'S ESCALADE - HOLLYWOOD STATION - DAY

BAM! The driver's door SLAMS shut, and the MUSIC cuts out with it.

Sam's in the passenger seat, briefcase and script restored. Zev's at the wheel. Car is parked.

ZEV

Sam. I don't care if you're in a prison in Dubai or a cell at Riker's -- you don't speak to cops without me present.

SAM

Got it. Thanks, buddy.

ZEV

... you good?

Sam forces a nod. BING! He looks to his home screen --

An EMAIL NOTIFICATION from THE KID.

ZEV

Let's get you out of here.

Sam taps the EMAIL and reads, annoyed, as Zev pulls out of the lot.

Dear Sam,

Thank you for taking the time this morning at breakfast, man.

I'm following up to see if you've read my script yet?

I look forward to hearing your feedback bro. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Cheers,

The Kid

Sam ignores it. The *gall* of this Kid. He looks to the script, and back to Zev.

SAM

... do you know? Are all of you in on it?

ZEV

In on what?

Sam takes Zev in, seeming genuine.

SAM

... never mind.

A beat. Sam skips to Page 48... 49... *there it is* -- Nina's accusation, the cops, all on the page, just as it happened.

ZEV

Good read?

SAM

Not exactly.

Zev pulls up to the main road.

ZEV

Where to, boss?

Sam ponders, at a loss.

Begrudgingly, he flips to the next page, 55, and scans the Scene Heading.

Recognizing the location from what The Kid slipped at breakfast, he knows his next move. His eyes --

**EXT. EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD HOTEL - LOS ANGELES -
AFTERNOON**

-- light up.

Sam faces down the entryway of the EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD HOTEL. Zev, still behind the wheel, shouts through the open passenger window.

ZEV
I'm here if you need me. Don't do
anything stupid.

Sam looks to Zev, and back to the lobby, hesitant. He moves inside. The Kid must be here, somewhere.

**INT. EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD HOTEL - LOS ANGELES -
AFTERNOON**

There's a buzz of activity moving about. Chic millennials and blinged Gen Z'ers without day jobs shuffle towards the ELEVATORS. Some event is going on. Sam moves to the FRONT DESK, approaches a CONCIERGE.

SAM
Hi there, sorry -- my phone died
and I forget my colleague's room
number. The Kid?

CONCIERGE
I'm sorry, sir. We can't disclose
our guest's information.

SAM
You do know who I am, ya?

CONCIERGE
I couldn't give less of a fuck,
sir. If you'll excuse me.

The CONCIERGE gestures to another guest in line. Sam pulls back into the lobby, scans the space. Clocks a sign, welcoming guests to an *It's Almost Friday Rooftop Party*, when his phone --

BUZZES. Pulls it out. **AMY**. Frustrated, he answers, as he continues to scan the space for his target.

SAM
Hi, honey. Not the best time.

AMY (O.C.)
Mom said you're not coming to
Derek's party?

SAM
She -- what?!

AMY
Mom texted saying you're not
coming to Derek's party.

SAM
Where are you?

AMY
I'm at school, Dad, and I don't
have much time before they find
me, so are you coming or not?

Sam scans the bustling lobby, mistaking many for The Kid upon
first glance, but none are.

SAM
Well -- did your mother mention
that she failed to invite me?

AMY
I don't give a shit, you need to
be there. It'll crush him if
you're not.

SAM
Amy, I have the premiere tonight.
Don't you think it's a little
suspicious that your mother
decided to double book his --

AMY
That's none of my business, Dad.
What's important to me is that
you're there. Figure it out.

SAM
I'm not sure I'll be able to --

AMY
This one matters.

KKKKK -- the line drops. Sam exhales, irate.

SAM
GAAAAH!

Giving up on his manual search, he reluctantly looks back to
the script, flips to Page 57.

We glimpse the location in the SCENE HEADING below as he does.

**INT. FLOOR 12 - EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD HOTEL -
AFTERNOON**

Sam sizes up the new scene. A wall panel -- 12th Floor -- indicates room numbers. He looks to the script, finds his target...

He hangs a right. We INTERCUT between the numbers printed on the page and the doors as they pass by... Room 1218... 1219... 1220... 1221.

A script lowers to REVEAL a door: Room 1221.

Sam stares it down. There's action inside, laughter, hollering... it appears The Kid is not alone.

Sam takes a beat. KNOCK KNOCK.

No response, but chatter inside, conversations overlapping:

Fuck you, no FUCK you -- Mama, you filthy queen -- bro, be nice, he can hear you -- I'm between jobs right now -- no, fuck you, you small dick, degenerate fuck!

KA-POW! Door 1221 BURSTS open and out comes a YOUNG WOMAN rocketing down the hallway, hysterical. *Now's Sam's moment.* He pops inside as a young BRO pops out, screaming after her -- *and you're a conniving fake whore--*

**INT. PENTHOUSE - ROOM 1221 - EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD -
CONT.**

BOOM. The door closes before we hear the BRO finish. Sam's inside, takes in the scene --

The PENTHOUSE is brimming with pretty things starving for meals, approval and purpose. Some music, some drugs, plenty of awfulness.

But no immediate sign of The Kid.

Sam breezes through, searching. There are looks in his direction. Not the good kind.

Some huddle on the bed, others trade puffs on the balcony. And while these people fit the profile - The Kid does not appear to be here. Sam considers the script in hand, but instead stops to inquire to those he passes:

SAM
You know where the Kid is?

Shoulder shrugs. Sam tries another.

SAM
Hey - any clue where I can find
The Kid?

PARTYGOER #1
Whoa -- you run Silverhead! You're
Sam Feldberg!

SAM
Feldstein, shitface.

Sam keeps it moving as the Partygoer's friends roast him for his embarrassing error. Making no progress, Sam reaches for his script, when --

ROCKY (O.C.)
Didn't think you'd actually follow
through.

Wait. We know that voice. Sam pivots to find Rocky Jones alienated by the wall with tear-stained eyes perking up with hope, at last.

Sam looks to the briefcase in hand. *Oh shit.*

ROCKY
How'd you find me?

SAM
I'm not -- I'm sorry, that's not
why I'm --

ROCKY
What's it called?

Rocky approaches, intrigued. Sam shakes his head in disbelief. Like a rat in a trap...

SAM
... it's not for you.

ROCKY
You show up here with a script in
hand in a place like this, and you
expect me to believe it's not for
--

SAM
The Kid. I'm here to see The Kid.

A beat. Annoyed, Rocky yanks the script from Sam's briefcase.

SAM
Rocky, don't --

Rocky eyes the title page, clocks the screenwriter.

ROCKY
Huh... you here to make him an offer?

SAM
I just want a conversation. Do you know where he is?

ROCKY
Must be pretty good for you to show up in person, and not one of your fourteen lackeys.

SAM
You don't understand.

ROCKY
Sure I do. I want a part in it.

Another beat.

SAM
You don't.

ROCKY
What part of my threat earlier did you not understand?

SAM
... I'm protecting you.

ROCKY
No, you're protecting yourself, Sam. Because I'll do it, loud and proud. You think I won't?

SAM
Please, Rocky... I can't do this right now.

ROCKY
I told you, I've got nothing to lose. I've got half the Internet ripping me a new asshole that you'd love a go at.

They lock eyes. A loaded pause, before Rocky breaks:

ROCKY

You know, we had something Sam...
back in Italy. On the coast. We
had a real connection.

SAM

(lowers his voice)
I know that.

ROCKY

And maybe the online assaults
would sting a bit less if I had
someone to lean on.

SAM

... I'm here for you. I am.

ROCKY

But you're not. And I can't wait
for you anymore.

SAM

I care about you. I do. I hate to
see them bully you online, I don't
want to see you hurt.

ROCKY

If you don't want to hurt me --
(beat)
Then let me read this script.

Rocky turns to leave with it but --

WHAM! Sam grabs hold. Rocky maintains his grip. A tug-of-war
ensues. Eyes lock, tension felt, fear, anger, *resentment*. But
Rocky pulls harder and --

SLASH! Sam is PAPER CUT as --

SAM

FUCK!

-- *Rocky exits with the script in his possession.* Sam holds
back, sucks his finger bleeding out as he registers --

Rocky disappearing into a huddle of bodies... *shit.*

Sam goes after him and crashes into the crowd! Wine spills,
glass CRACKS. *Hey, asshole! Get out of here!* Sam's eyes snap to
the door, winding shut --

Sam dives for it, swings it back, turns to see --

INT. FLOOR 12 - EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD HOTEL - CONT.

Rocky making headway down the hotel HALLWAY. Sam pursues.

SAM

ROCKY!

Rocky glances back to see Sam on his tail, and bolts it. A COUPLE exits a hotel room - Sam bulldozes through. "Hey man, chill!"

1217...1216...1215...1214... Rocky hangs a left, disappears around the corner. Sam picks up the pace, zags around the bend to see --

Rocky running, penguin legs. Sam closes the gap with sheer determination... and lunges for the tackle! They hit the ground hard as --

DING! An ELEVATOR opens carrying a fresh crop of pretty things as Sam winds back the crippling --

BLOW -- to Rocky's face. The crowd GASPS, both in the chute and down the hall, people swarming to watch the commotion.

Rocky's expression crumbles, as Sam seizes control of the script and escapes through the EMERGENCY EXIT.

INT. EMERGENCY STAIRS - EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD HOTEL - AFTERNOON

Mmph mmph mmph mmhph. BASS THUNDERS from the ROOFTOP a floor above. Sam charges up the steps, in a sweat, on a mission.

EXT. ROOFTOP - EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD HOTEL - AFTERNOON - CONT.

Sam barrels through the EXIT latch to a --

RAGER. The HIVE of activity and the heart of the awful. TWO HUNDRED pretty things partying by a pool overlooking the city of dreams.

FIST BUMPS to the sky, COKE BUMPS to the nose. Tequila, flowing. Bare skin, ripped abs, Bentley sunglasses. Excess and carefree abandon under a sweltering, peak California sun.

Sam, in his tailored suit, stands out of place. He loosens his tie, proceeds into the mass of --

FLESH. Kissing, tongues wet. Mmph mmph mmph mmph...

At the far end of the party is a VIP SECTION with booths and bottle service. Sam pushes towards it, as --

FACES pass, ravaged by botox, envy, *rejection*. Those who Sam and the people like him said no to, partying their problems away to a *mmph mmph mmph mmhph...*

Cutting through the mass, Sam pales at the sight of his target --

THE KID. Planted in a VIP corner booth, surrounded by hot BABES and fawning YES-MEN. Man of the moment, twink of the century - Timothee Chalamet has never looked better.

The Kid looks in our direction. A devilish smile crosses his lips. Sam makes his approach before --

BODYGUARD

Whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa!

-- a BODYGUARD blocks his path. A beat.

THE KID

Easy, he's good. Let him through!

The BODYGUARD shoots him a lethal glare. Sam proceeds forward, like a knight stepping before his Grace. The Kid shouts over the relentless BASS --

THE KID

SAMMY BOY! WELCOME!

SAM

I need to speak with you. NOW.

THE KID

(pretending not to hear)

WHAT?!

SAM

You and me. Downstairs. RIGHT NOW.

THE KID

Ah, no, no, no, can't you see I'm with my friends, my guy? I'm afraid you're catching me at a bad time.

SAM

Don't fuck with me.

THE KID

Don't fuck with me.

SAM

Stop it.

THE KID

Stop it!

SAM
I'LL KILL YOU!

THE KID
I'LL KILL YOU!

Sam LUNGES at the table but the BODYGUARD pulls him back! The BASS rages harder, louder, *punishing with intensity... MMPH MMPH MMPH...*

THE KID
How about YOUR people call MY people, and we pencil in a time? Cool?

SAM
Why are you doing this to me...

THE KID
Doing what, pal? YOU SHOULD BE THANKING ME! I gave you life!

SAM
You've RUINED my life!

THE KID
No, no, no. Not yet.

Sam takes this in, still bristling against the BODYGUARD's restraint, without realizing the crowd turns their back to us -- *something else has captured their attention...*

The bass rages harder... *MMPH MMPH MMPH MMPH...*

THE KID
Hey Sammy, why haven't you finished my script, man? Scared at what you'll find? Not cool to make up your mind before you're even done, dude.

Sam's eyes narrow, fuming. He'd kill this Kid if he got his hands on him...

THE KID
Look, if you did sit down to read it, you'd know what's going to happen next. Spoiler alert, TITLE drop! Not sure you're going to love it, bro...

The Kid smiles as the BASS peaks before --

KKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKK! The DJ cuts off the music, cold.

ROCKY (O.C.)
What if I could fly?

Sam pauses. Was that --

ROCKY (O.C.)
What if I'm really a superhero?

Sam rotates to see what the PARTY's already gaping up at --

ROCKY JONES, defiant, teetering on the rooftop ledge...

PHONES are out, RECORDING. LIVE-STREAMING.

ROCKY
I'M A FUCKING SUPERHERO!

The CROWD erupts with approval! Sam looks over to the VIP booth -- but The Kid is gone. He turns back to Rocky.

ROCKY
You think it's fun up here? Do I
look happy to you? Do you have any
idea how many people want me dead?
How many threats I get on the
daily?

A beat. Confusion in the crowd. Sam, filling with dread, inches closer towards Rocky.

ROCKY
"You're going to Hell, Rocky.
You're sexualizing children,
Rocky. Hang yourself, Rocky."
Okay. Well to my haters, I say --
CHEERS fellas!

The crowd lights up again. Rocky shoots back a shot. A STORM churns in the distant horizon...

ROCKY
But that's just the half of it.
You think it's the haters that
keep me up at night? No, no, we've
all had our haters.
(beat)
We grew up with them. Learned to
live with them. We built our
masks, dropped our voices, and
shook their hands with a smile.
You'll see. You'll see what I do
one day.

Through a phone's CAMERA POV --

A LIVESTREAM FEED: Rocky on the roof, is endowed by Silverhead's viral #Bulge filter, continuing over:

ROCKY

No, no, no. Haters don't break hearts. The people who hurt are the people who *matter* -- the ones who claim they love you.

Rocky tosses his drink to a SHATTER!

ROCKY

SAM FELDSTEIN!

Shit. Sam goes white. CAMERAS turn in his direction now...

ROCKY

You said you'd leave your wife for me.

(voice cracking)

You said we had a future together. Now I know I'm nothing to you.

(beat)

Thanks for the part, boss.

Sam remains still. Mumbblings amongst the crowd... cat's out of the bag now...

ROCKY

All of you think I have dead eyes?
I'LL SHOW YOU DEAD EYES!

CAMERAS WHIP back to Rocky as he inches closer to the ledge... some ASSHOLES even call for him to JUMP...

ROCKY

None of you love me, none of you really care. But maybe you will now.

From Rocky's vantage point, he catches a glimpse of the CAPTAIN QUEER billboard we'd seen looming over Sunset -- *and its tagline...*

ROCKY

"The greater the storm..."

Rocky's eyes fill with resolve.

SAM

Rocky, don't --

... Rocky raises his arms...

ROCKY

"... the brighter the rainbow!"

... *and plunges off the roof!* The CROWD inhales, as --

-- SOUND CUTS --

A hero falls, arms outspread. We HOLD on the drop, silent until the brutal --

SPLAT! Thirteen stories down, Rocky implodes upon impact with Sunset Boulevard.

And the Party. Goes. Mad.

MASS PANIC. Chaos SURGES, voices SHRIEK. Sam stands paralyzed in the eye of the chaos as bodies rush past and the physical blows pile on...

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD - EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD - AFTERNOON

Bodies disperse to REVEAL Sam watching on from the sidewalk. FIRST RESPONDERS cordon off the area with tape.

ONLOOKERS cluster at the sidelines, phones out, capturing the fallen hero in a pool of his own blood, billowing out on the concrete, a gruesome end... Rocky has left his mark after all.

An ESCALADE pulls up. Zev.

ZEV
Sam, get in.

But Sam stays put. Through the pandemonium, he clocks a MOTORCYCLE peeling out of the PARKING GARAGE...

The Kid.

He winks in our direction, whips his helmet's visor shut, ZOOMS off down the block to REVEAL --

Another MOTORCYCLE, parked shiny on the curb.

Sam gets the idea. His eyes fill with --

Vengeance. The MUSICAL SCORE kicks into high gear as --

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD - EDITION - WEST HOLLYWOOD - AFTERNOON

An ENGINE revs. GEARS into DRIVE. REVEAL a FACE - Sam, in the helmet from the handlebars. DROPS the VISOR into place, mashes the PETAL, FLOORS IT and --

We're off.

ZEV
SAM! GET BACK HERE!

EXT. WEST SUNSET BOULEVARD - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

vrooom! Sam dodges traffic. HORNS blare behind.

He spots the Kid half a mile ahead. PEDESTRIANS rubberneck: a chase is on.

The Kid rips through an intersection. LIGHT turns YELLOW. Sam is raging, throttles, GUNS it --

LIGHT turns RED. WHOOSH! Sam bolts through the crossing as side TRAFFIC nears --

BEEEEEEEEEP! The Kid glances back, mildly impressed as he registers Sam in pursuit, before speeding up and --

SKSKSKSKSKSKSKSK -- veering dangerously fast onto --

EXT. N FAIRFAX AVENUE - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

-- N. Fairfax. Sam catches on, decelerates, whips the corner, wobbling. The Kid's made headway. Sam steadies, zooms forward when --

A TOUR BUS blocks the lane. Shit. The Kid swerves left, Sam veers right, into oncoming --

BRRRRRAAAAAAMMM! Near-miss TRAFFIC! Sam swerves back with inches to SPARE. We hold back on the BUS as tourists snap pics and a TOUR GUIDE caps us off with a --

TOUR GUIDE
WELCOME TO HOLLYWOOD!

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BLVD - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

We TRACK The Kid blazing down the boulevard, disappearing out of view before --

Sam reappears! We LOCK on to him, holding steady as SIGNS blur past -- MARQUEES, Billboards, movie premieres, Captain Queer, Rocky...

Sam remembers, his eyes narrow... he THROTTLES again, MASHES the pedal... his eyes stray to the SPEEDOMETER as numbers CLIMB, FAST... we peer back up from it to see --

EXT. LOS ANGELES RIVER - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

-- we're now on the Los Angeles River. CONCRETE stretches into the distance as CLOUDS unload overhead. The Kid zooms through a puddle, kicking back.

Sam clocks his new surroundings, reorienting as he cuts through what becomes HEAVY RAIN...

KA-BOOM! LIGHTNING, THUNDER. SPARKS burst from PHONE LINES...

Sam pulls alongside the Kid, angles the bars for a finishing nudge, but first --

The Kid SLAMS his brakes and SQUEALS out of view! Sam shoots past and squeezes his own, but HURTLES through the BRIDGE's underpass before --

SAM

Shit.

WHOOM! Too fast on the brakes, he goes FLYING over his handlebars. BAM! Eats shit on the concrete.

A moment. Sam's eyes trickle open to see --

RAINDROPS. Striking the ground. Small puddles, wider ripples. Through the misty HAZE --

THE KID dismounts, removes his helmet and strides over from the horizon line, assured in his leather jacket.

THE KID

Figured an exec like you would
love a chase like *that*!

Rain cascades, clouds rumbling from above...

THE KID

You really couldn't wait for that
meeting, huh?

The Kid plants his boot on Sam's neck. Straining against its pressure:

SAM

... you -- you killed him. And
Stephanie too.

THE KID

Me? Don't shoot the messenger,
pal. I gave you the truth.

Sam's never looked so weak.

SAM
How are you doing this?

THE KID
Simple, really. I confronted a
blank page -- and I wrote.
(beat)
Something, from nothing. The
nature of all creation.

SAM
You're -- delusional.

THE KID
That makes two of us. Takes a bit
of crazy to make it in this town,
hm?

SAM
I want out. I want no part in
this.

THE KID
But you've got the lead part!

SAM
I don't want it. I want my life
back.

THE KID
What life? This is your life.

The Kid removes his boot and crouches to Sam's level.

THE KID
Where were you before breakfast,
pal?

SAM
I -- I --

He racks his brain. Can't think of it. The Kid cracks a
sinister smile...

SAM
... I - I don't know.

THE KID
Because there's nothing there.
(beat)
Your existence commenced at the
moment this movie began and will
end the moment it ends. Not a
moment sooner, or a moment later.

SAM

No...

THE KID

Everything else is just --
(theater hands)
Backstory.

SAM

You're lying!

THE KID

No, Sammy. You're lying to
yourself. You are nothing but a
character I invented. *My sweet
creation.*

The Kid runs his hands through Sam's hair, possessive.

THE KID

And here you are, burdened with
the privilege of being conscious,
and aware of a truth no one else
but you and I know.

Sam resists the information, utterly terrified.

THE KID

This is the only place you'll ever
call home, between the walls of
the first frame and the last. And
I know you suit types think us
scribes are expendable, but maybe
now you can see, that the truth is
--

(leaning closer)

There is no you outside of me.
This is my revenge story.

The Kid stands, wipes his hands.

THE KID

I'll leave you with a question,
Sam. Considering your Cut to Black
is fast approaching...

Sam shakes his head, eyes widening.

THE KID

What type of character do you want
to be?

SMASH CUT TO

INT. SAM'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - AFTERNOON

Sam sits numb on his couch wrapped in a towel, wet from the rain. He looks so... small. *TICK... TICK... TICK...* VOICES bleed in, MUFFLED.

AMANDA (O.C.)

Sam... hey, Sam...

Amanda, Hornsby and Zev are in his office.

AMANDA (O.C.)

Sam?

Sam reorients, slowly. Numb.

HORNSBY

We don't have time to waste. We need to put out the official statement, and fast.

AMANDA

I've got a draft. Sam, are you with us?

He's not, but he nods, solemn.

HORNSBY

Let's hear it.

Amanda reads from a paper.

AMANDA

"All of us at Silverhead Studios are devastated by the unexpected and heartbreaking loss of Rocky Jones. A vital member of our creative family, Rocky's warmth, charisma and talent have left an
-- "

HORNSBY

Can't say talent.

AMANDA

Scratch talent?

HORNSBY

No talent. Sam?

Sam takes this in.

SAM

... sure.

AMANDA

-- "Rocky's warmth and charisma... have left an indelible mark on us all. Our deepest sympathies and thoughts extend to his family, friends, and loved ones during this extraordinarily difficult time."

Distracted, Sam pulls out his phone and reloads the *Captain Queer* review page from earlier...

The previous 55 refreshes to an 82.

AMANDA

"As we grapple with his loss, we find solace in honoring Rocky's trailblazing performance in this weekend's wide release of "Captain Fabulous," the first LGBT superhero picture in movie history."

The critics have spoken. The film is Certified Fresh.

AMANDA

"While we mourn Rocky's physical absence, his spirit will last upon the silver screen and will inspire generations to come."

Sam registers the new score, as Amanda takes in their reaction.

ZEV

... "we'll meet again at the end of the rainbow?"

HORNSBY

Zev.

ZEV

Just spitballing here.

AMANDA

What do we think? Ship it?

HORNSBY

You've got a hyperlink to Fandango, ya?

AMANDA

Yup. Title's a link to click. For convenience, of course.

HORNSBY
Ship it, and fast. Sam?

Sam shrugs. A half-hearted yes.

HORNSBY
Hey buddy, why didn't you tell me
about you two?

His eyes catch Hornsby's. Sam looks away, uncomfortable.

AMANDA
They were an open secret for
months, Hornsby. Where were you?

HORNSBY
I didn't know. I didn't even know
he swung that way...

ZEV
He greenlit 'Captain Queer', boss?

HORNSBY
That could have helped you with
the Board, Sam! I could work with
that!

Sam takes this in.

ZEV
Presales are up 600% in the past
two hours alone. That doesn't move
the needle?

HORNSBY
That's not for you to know.

SAM
Do we have to cancel the premiere?

AMANDA
Cancel? Are you nuts? The show
goes on.

ZEV
Rocky would have wanted us to
continue, man...

SAM
Rocky didn't want to continue.

AMANDA
Oh, come on. Are we going to stand
here and pretend?
(MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Sam, I know you two were close. But the man was not well, I mean, clearly. We spent half a mil' on his therapy throughout production --

HORNSBY

Not to mention the two *hundred* million we just spent on him to be the face of a franchise.

AMANDA

Yup. And look, I want to be sensitive here, considering the circumstances, but, fuck. I can't say it.

ZEV

Say it. We're all thinking it.

HORNSBY

Say it!

AMANDA

This is the best thing that could have happened to our movie. *This - this is the miracle we needed.*

A *miracle* -- that hits Sam, hard. A realization dawning on him of how cruel character can really go.

AMANDA

Chatter's through the roof. Video of his diatribe with his Bulge bouncin' in the wind -- I mean, you can't make this shit up.

ZEV

I mean, this is James Dean, Marilyn Monroe infamy. The man's just left his mark on Hollywood history, for Christ's sake.

AMANDA

Yup. We spent a hundred mil' on P&A and all we needed was a few too many lines of coke.

Sam considers their shamelessness.

HORNSBY

Alright, that's enough.

AMANDA

Forget breaking even, we might even pull a nice profit.

ZEV

Off the books, of course. Thanks to Sammy here we're back in the game. Congrats, buddy.

Zev pats Sam on the shoulder, before he and Amanda move to the exit. Hornsby stays back with Sam.

AMANDA (O.C.)

I'll get this over to Comms now. We're back baby, we're back...

They leave.

HORNSBY

Look, Sam. This might have changed the calculus a bit. Perhaps I spoke too soon this morning.

Sam perks up.

HORNSBY

I don't want to get ahead of myself, and Natalie won't go down without a fight, but let me just say -- the Board's now thrilled with you, pal.

Hornsby moves through the door, turning back with a:

HORNSBY

I'll be in touch.

KA-TOOP. He's gone.

Sam notes Hornsby's shift, intrigued.

If *that's* how the game is played...

Sam eyes SPOILER below.

A new devious idea emerges...

His eyes glint with darker intent...

... is *that* the type of character he wants to be?

**INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE
AFTERNOON**

WOOP! Sam's in the lobby.

He peers down to see the briefcase is tucked snug under his arm. Sitting up ahead in her glass office is --

Natalie. Landline to her ear, none the wiser...

On Sam, malevolent gears turning like clockwork, before --

He makes his approach.

ASSISTANTS in his path scatter, avoiding him like the plague now, afraid.

Natalie clocks his impending arrival, face falling. TAP TAP. Sam's knuckle on the door. She gestures him inside. He pauses, hesitant -- then enters.

**INT. NATALIE'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE
AFTERNOON - CONT.**

NATALIE
(into the phone)
Well, Lincoln said it best. Best
way to predict your future is to
create it. Get it done.

BAM. She hangs up. Sam registers the walls, lined with posters of her hit TV drama, *The Duke of Scrubs*.

SAM
Now's an okay time?

NATALIE
No time like the present. What's
this concerning?

SAM
Right to business, I love it.
(gesturing to the chair)
May I?

NATALIE
Please.

Sam sits, plays it cool.

SAM
Look, Natalie.
(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

It's no secret that you and I have had our differences over the years. But given the gravity of today's events --

NATALIE

I'm so sorry to hear about Rocky, and Sarah --

SAM

Stephanie, actually, but --
(clears throat)
-- and thank you, for that --
it's just -- hm, you know, I was thinking -- why not let bygones be bygones, ya?

Natalie's taking this in, waiting for his angle.

SAM

Look, whoever gets the top job, be it man, or woman, I think we can both agree it'll be the best candidate for the position.

NATALIE

Sure, Sam, but -- I mean, let's be honest here -- I think you and I both know how the Board is leaning.

SAM

Oh sure, sure -- and like I said, I'm comfortable with that decision. It's the reason I'm here, actually. I come to you with an olive branch.

Sam drops the script on her desk. His face conveys no reaction. Something has broken inside of him.

SAM

Considering there's a good chance it might be you running the joint... I'd love to get your take on this piece of material.

Natalie leans forward, curious, glances at the name on the title page.

NATALIE

Oh, The Kid's such a talent.

SAM
Oh, yes, indeed.

NATALIE
Do we have first read?

SAM
Yes, in fact, we do. Which is why
I'm bringing it to you now. I'd
hate for others to get their hands
on it.

NATALIE
We'd be fools not to make an
offer.

SAM
High praise! It's almost like he
wrote you saying that, hah!

NATALIE
What's it about?

Natalie picks it up. Sam chuckles, nervous.

SAM
Well. The best stories really do
put you in the character's shoes,
no?

NATALIE
Of course.

Natalie flips a couple pages, skimming. Sam watches her
carefully...

... her face drops, realizing.

NATALIE
Oh.

SAM
... yeah...

NATALIE
It's about --
(meeting his eyes)
You?

SAM
Well, not entirely. Did you miss
your cameo?

She pales.

NATALIE

... what.

SAM

I believe it's on the first page?

Natalie flips back, quick. A beat, before --

NATALIE

What is this?

SAM

Crazy, I know.

NATALIE

When did he submit this?

SAM

Earlier today.

NATALIE

Does Legal know?

SAM

Not yet. I'll show them, of course, but I wanted to get your take on it first.

NATALIE

Alright, well. How about you leave this copy with me, and I'll give it a read over the --

SAM

No, no.

Natalie pauses.

SAM

I think you should read a little more.

NATALIE

I'm a bit swamped at the moment, Sam --

SAM

Sure, sure, but -- look, Natalie, I really do value your creative judgement, and we don't have the luxury of time given the buzz around this Kid. I'm happy to wait here if you want to just skim a little deeper?

Natalie takes a beat.

She leans back to the page.

Sam swallows.

NATALIE
I'll skim a few.

SAM
... perfect!

She flips to the next page.

His eyes narrow, wolfish.

Her eyes read, alarmed...

She flips to the next page.

Sam's sweating.

His knee is shaking.

Her eyes widen --

And Sam's do too. And just as he braces for what's next,
salivating --

RING RING RING RING RING!

She perks up, pivots away. Her LANDLINE has lit up.

NATALIE
Just a second, Sam.

Natalie settles the script and answers her phone.

Sam pulls back, reeling. He clocks JOSH and other ASSISTANTS
watching him through the glass. They look away, play busy.

NATALIE
Hi, honey... no, sweetie, your
father is picking you up from
practice. I'm completely swamped
today.

Shit. Sam reacts to this, softening.

NATALIE
I'm sorry, sweetie. You know I'm
trying my best. Look, honey, I'm
just in a meeting right now, can I
call you back in a little?

Sam looks to SPOILER sitting innocuously on her desk...

NATALIE
Alright, I love ---

KKKKK -- the line drops before she can finish.

She takes a beat. He can't move. She *leans back*.

NATALIE
Sorry about that, Sam. Where were we?

Sam's mind is in OVERDRIVE, before --

He GRABS the script. And shoots up from his seat.

SAM
Sorry.

NATALIE
Huh?

SAM
Sorry. I -- I shouldn't have.
That's not who I want to -- excuse me.

Sam makes a beeline for the door.

NATALIE
Do you mind leaving the copy here?

SAM
I do, actually.

NATALIE
Alright, well now you're just wasting my time.

SAM
No, Natalie.
(turns)
I just bought you time.

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE AFTERNOON - CONT.

Quickly, he retreats to his office, guilt-ridden. Behind him, Natalie sits, confused.

INT. SAM'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - LATE AFTERNOON

Sam sinks into his office chair, ashamed.

RAINDROPS tap the window. Quiet, at last.

He grabs a PEN, taps the desk. *TAP TAP TAP TAP*.

The PENDULUM CLOCK ticks on the wall. *TICK TICK TICK TICK*.

Sam's attention strays to the WATERFALL photo on his desk we glimpsed at earlier.

He focuses on Derek, smiling wide. Innocent.

He looks over to the landline, apprehensive.

Is that the character he wants to be?

He lifts the phone, hesitates -- *SPEED DIALS*.

The line RINGS.

He waits. It RINGS. *TICK TICK TICK TICK*.

He looks back to the WATERFALL photo, happier days of the four of them. Yet now, the PHONE RINGS on.

He moves to hang up but then --

DEREK

Hi, Pa.

Derek has answered.

SAM

Hey, hey, buddy... how's the birthday boy doin'?

A long pause.

DEREK

Why didn't you tell me?

Sam blushes, takes a beat.

SAM

... tell you what?

DEREK

Rocky, on the roof? All my friends have seen it, Dad. It's everywhere.

Sam blanches. His true self, exposed to his son. His worst nightmare.

SAM
Rocky's not well. It's not true,
Derek.

DEREK
... it's not?

SAM
No, no, buddy.

DEREK
Oh, well. I wish it was.

That lands. Sam reacts. Not what he was expecting.

DEREK
Explains why you and Mom aren't
together anymore. I thought --
well -- I thought you just moved
on from us.

Sam's eyes well up. He stumbles over his words, incapable of communicating with vulnerability...

SAM
What? No... Derek, of course
that's not -- you know, it's your
Mom, she -- she's quite the...
well, you know, buddy. I'm not
perfect, okay?

DEREK
I know. I'm sorry, I didn't mean
to say --

SAM
I don't want you to think for one
second that I don't -- you know,
that I don't care about you guys,
kiddo, cause -- that's crazy. But
I wish it was different too.

DEREK
Yeah... I miss the way it was.

SAM
Yeah! Me too. Huh.
(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

(concedes)

And hey... sorry about the birthday present, you know, my, my assistant got things a little mixed up, but, you know, I'm going to make it up to you, okay?

DEREK

Oh -- that's okay.

SAM

And I'll...

Sam considers this carefully, before dropping:

SAM

I'll see you at your party too.

DEREK

Great! Sorry Dad, I gotta run, before Mom walks in.

SAM

... right, well -- Derek, I, I - love ya buddy...

DEREK

Ya, love you. See ya tonight, Dad --

SAM

And happy happy --

The LINE DROPS.

White noise lingers. *TICK TICK TICK TICK.*

Sam hangs up, guilty.

He can't sit with this feeling. And so we stay with him as we see it morph into anger.

Righteous anger. Sam looks to the script, and over to --

The paper shredder.

INT. SAM'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - MOMENTS LATER

Sam's FINGER hits the POWER button...

... and the shredder's engine whirs to life.

Sam peers into its twisting gears. Buzzing, rumbling, *hungry*.

Sam lifts *SPOILER* above the shredder like he's about to toss the One Ring into Mordor. He takes one last glance at the title page.

SPOILER
by THE KID

Payback time.

Sam pushes *SPOILER* into the SHREDDER'S FANGS...

POP! A bulb blows, glass rains. Sam holds firm, pushes the script deeper... a terrible BUZZING, death by a thousand paper cuts.

POP! Another bulb. A FLASH of LIGHTNING through the window. The room starts to shake like a RATTLING DOLLHOUSE...

The script puts up a good fight, it's not an easy pass. But Sam keeps pushing...

THE END OF MEN poster vibrates on the wall.

PICTURE FRAMES of Derek and Amy, fall, *shatter*. But Sam keeps pushing, until --

Shards slip loose from the machine's hold, floating weightlessly to the paper graveyard below where writers' movie dreams go to die...

POP! The POWER BLOWS and the IMAGE GLITCHES to --

INT. SAM'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - DUSK

Sam, on the ground. The atmosphere is quiet, altered -- heavy.

You can hear the crunch and ruffle of texture, touch, vibrations. Like we're a thousand miles below sea level, or a thousand miles up in the cosmos.

Sam pushes himself to his feet, spots the PENDULUM CLOCK on the wall --

But it's not TICKING now. Unsettled, Sam moves through the door to face --

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - DUSK

The executive office frozen in time. A wondrous but unsettling tableaux of noise and chaos rendered still. Sam takes it in.

Amanda, Zev, Josh, Assistants. An ass crack or two exposed. A floating orb of fallen coffee. Mouths to ears, secrets trading.

Sam plods his way through the environment, while we see it dawn on him -- is this, finally, his opportunity...

... to escape?

CLICK. He fists the ELEVATOR button. A beat. DING! The DOORS slide open. He steps inside and the DOORS CLOSE.

INT. ELEVATOR - THE LOT - DUSK - CONT.

We hold on Sam as we're going down. *Tense.*

ELEVATOR (O.C.)

Lobby.

The car jerks to a stop. DING! The DOORS slide open to REVEAL --

INT. LOBBY - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - DUSK - CONT.

A glitch-ridden lobby: low-res polygonal walls, a CG-water fountain, 'LOREM IPSUM' posters in place of the real ones.

Sam crosses a SECRETARY to see she's only been half-loaded in...

This feels eerie, off-limits, like we've waded into forbidden territory outside the mise-en-scene. Sam hastens his exit through the glass doors on to --

EXT. SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - THE LOT - DUSK - CONT.

THE LOT. Through static rain drops, the avenue extends into the hazy distance where that massive poster of the COWBOY from *The End of Men* remains on the hanger wall.

Moving deeper, there are GOLF CARTS and GRIPS on smoke breaks, buildings blurring into oblivion...

Sam ventures down the road to nothingness, as the poster of the COWBOY looms closer... and closer... until --

The COWBOY suddenly animates with life and turns to REVEAL his face with a terrifying smile. Sam wipes out and --

EXT. DESERT - DUSK - CONT.

-- SLAMS onto rocky ground. A beat. Wind WHISTLES, crows CAW.

Then, a looming STAMPEDE of hooves... like the churn of an impending FREIGHT TRAIN... Sam peers up to see --

A Texas landscape. Rolling hills into the distance, straight out of an old Western film.

Past a tumbleweed carried with the breeze, against the haze of a white hot mirage, little black spots charge from the horizon line... Sam recognizes this image -- **THE END OF MEN.**

A DOZEN COWBOYS ride the charge like the cavalry from hell!

BLACK STALLIONS snort and flare at the eye. Blazing a saddle, a JOHN WAYNE-type whips a pistol from his hip to --

FIRE! A BULLET whizzes past us. FIRE! And another. Sam throws himself to the ground as TATATA TAT! The COWBOYS unload into the distance, as Sam doubles over to see --

APACHES on horseback with spears on a collision course with COWBOYS! Sam, dead center, bolts it. WHOOSH! A SPEAR grazes and takes down a COWBOY!

Sam dashes, hears IMPACTS, bones and bullets brutally colliding before -- BANG! Sam's shot, wipes out into --

INT. HOSPITAL - DUSK - CONT.

A GURNEY, moving, fast. DOCTORS shouting from above. An IV into veins, arms shackled. BLOOD seeping at the gauze wrapped tight around a shoulder. A bullet wound -- in Sam's shoulder.

Sam's being pushed top-speed through a hospital's HALLWAY. Hovering over him, he registers medical scrubs, panicked faces into walkies --

NURSE

Gunshot wound to the shoulder,
bullet punctured the subclavian
artery! Patient in critical
condition. Clear the OR!

Sam's face turns, annoyed. This is **THE DUKE OF SCRUBS.**

INT. OPERATING ROOM - HOSPITAL - DUSK - MOMENTS LATER

BEEP! A pulsing monitor, ECG racing. Sam takes in the action as DOCTORS work on him, scrambling.

DOCTOR

He's not going to make it!

SAM
... he's not?

BBBZZZZ! A DRILL appears -- a SURGEON to the rescue. Sam looks to the ceiling, pissed.

INT. HOSPITAL - DUSK - MOMENTS LATER

BEEP! Sam turns to a stable ECG. The doctors are gone, and the space is quiet. Too quiet. Heavy raindrops strike a window. Looking closer, Sam clocks water rising at the glass...

SAM
Hello?

No one comes. Sam, now in a hospital gown, pulls the IV out and steps out of bed. He creeps to the door, peeks out.

INT. CABIN HALLWAY - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

A long shadowy corridor of closed doors. The long GROAN of metal under stress, ominous and wavering, like something's about to SNAP...

Wet carpet oozes under flickering lights swaying back and forth. Sam steps outside, shuts the door behind him.

He proceeds down the hallway as a room service cart rolls past... gravity shifting on its axis, before --

BANG! Down the HALLWAY, water explodes through a cabin door! BANG! Another goes. BANG! Another. As the CABIN DOORS blow like dominos...

... Sam slides across the carpet towards what was just the farthest point of the hallway -- *and now the deepest drop to fall.*

He grabs a hold of a door's rim, CLINGS to dear life as WHOOSH! A falling room service tray pulls Sam with it into the rising flood and --

POOM! Sam cuts through the surface. Currents take hold, whirling him into a sudden and painful -- BOOM. Sam's skull smacks a pipe as SOUND CUTS. We FOLLOW his floating body, ascending until --

INT. CELLAR - CRUISE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

-- it breaks through the surface above, face down in the water.

A long, uncomfortable beat... before HANDS reach into view and pull Sam to the metal base of a stairwell.

These FINGERS feel his pulse. These PALMS compress his chest. These LIPS move to his mouth and breathe life back before --

WHOO! Sam shoots up, alive! Coughs and heaves up the saltwater. It takes a moment for him to recognize his savior:

DWAYNE, THE ROCK, fucking JOHNSON.

THE ROCK

This ship's going down fast. We need to move now!

Sam blinks, speechless.

THE ROCK

Come on. I got you.

The Rock lifts Sam to his feet and holds him for support as they limp up the STAIRCASE and through the EMERGENCY EXIT into --

INT. DINING HALL - MEZZANINE - CRUISE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The MEZZANINE overlooking the DINING HALL.

THE ROCK

EVERYONE OUT! THIS SHIP'S GOING DOWN!

It's CHAOS. Flying tables, panicked passengers. A floor-to-ceiling glass window REVEALS --

We're sinking below sea level. Glass CREAKS under the ocean's massive pressure. Sam sees CRACKS spiderweb... then --

GLASS BURSTS! The dining hall is engulfed in just seconds... fading into --

A CORPSE and DEBRIS haze... an off-key floating PIANO... then, from the abyss below --

Sam! Kicking against a current that drags him deeper... and deeper... until --

INT. WHITE ABYSS - UNKNOWN

He lands hard on a white surface. Coughing. Spits blood.

Splotches of water bloom in the white, turning gray like wet paper. Around us, a white void of nothingness extends into infinity...

It's as if Sam has fallen out of the world itself, and on to --
A blank page.

THE KID (OVERHEAD)
 Ah, the power of the blank page.
 Where nothing exists, but all is
 possible.

The Kid's voice booms overhead with the presence of God. Sam,
 lying on his back, shakes his head, incredulous.

THE KID (OVERHEAD)
 Do you believe now, in the power I
 wield?

Courier text of what they say materializes into thin air above,
 then disintegrates into black dust just as fast. Sam notices
 it.

SAM
 (emotional)
 ... I'm not ready to die.

THE KID (OVERHEAD)
 This movie's not over -- yet.

SAM
 But no one likes a downbeat
 ending, Kid. Have you considered
 doing a new draft?

THE KID (OVERHEAD)
 You've got notes?

SAM
 Um -- yeah, yeah, I do.

THE KID (OVERHEAD)
 Good. No movie's complete without
 a little... *studio interference.*

Sam registers the pivot, surprised by The Kid's reaction.

THE KID (OVERHEAD)
 Where to from here, boss?

Sam rises to his feet.

SAM
 I -- well, hrm. Will you let me
 out of here? I, uh -- I'd love to
 make my son's birthday, if
 possible.

THE KID (OVERHEAD)
 As you wish. And please -- reply
 to my email at your earliest
 convenience?

Email... Sam considers this as -- *THE GROUND QUAKES.*

Piece by piece, an environment loads into the blank space
 around him: emerald hedges, twinkling lights, running KIDS on
 the lawn coalescing into the setting of --

EXT. FELDSTEIN MANSION - BEVERLY HILLS - NIGHT

-- *Derek's birthday party.*

As promised, Sam made it. He reorients to his new surroundings:

Nina's transformed their Beverly Hill's backyard into a child's
 dream playground with different stations -- a magician booth,
 arcade games, a balloon toss, mini golf course, and more.

MARRIED PARENTS are on the sidelines watching on, engrossed in
 chatter with wine in hand, while their KIDS lose themselves to
 the fun.

Some register Sam's presence and turn to mingle and gossip. He
 catches sight of it, as --

NINA (O.C.)
 Wasn't expecting to see you here.

Sam turns to his side. *Nina.*

SAM
 It's clear you didn't want me to
 be.

NINA
 Hey, I'm not here to fight with
 you. Not here. Not now.

A beat.

SAM
 (taking in the space)
 This is beautiful, Nina.
 (then)
 You've done a beautiful job.

NINA
 Thank you for saying that.

They pause. Loaded silence as they take in the scene, both
 waiting for the other to speak first.

NINA

I'm really sorry about Rocky, Sam.

She hugs him, firm. He wasn't expecting that, but he eases into the moment and squeezes back. She pulls out to take him in, really take him in. There's love here, hiding amidst a story of pain and insult. She nods to him, then slips away into the party.

Keeping busy, Sam slinks his way over to the BAR, past a row of COUPLES chatting on. He signals the BARTENDER.

SAM

Some scotch, thanks.

Sam waits, discreet. He appears to be the only single person at this party of straight couples. The BARTENDER hands him the glass of scotch. Sam turns to face the party, leaning against the counter, sipping. His eyes meet --

AMY's, from afar. She smiles to him, approving. A moment between them, before she returns to her mini golf game in progress.

Sam scans the party searching for his son, when there, by the balloon toss --

He spots Derek with his back to us.

POP! Derek darts a target, and turns to celebrate with the bald man by his side -- Lance, cheering on.

And Sam's expression just craters.

He watches on, dismayed, as Derek winds up his next shot with Lance's support. Sam looks away only to see others eyeing him with sneers. Lips whisper. Delicious gossip.

Sam blushes, turns back to the bar, returns to his smartphone, looking important, casual, busy. Covering the fact that Derek's happiness without him has gotten under his skin. Sam isn't the type who waits. Others wait for him.

And so he OPENS his INBOX... and locates the EMAIL he ignored from THE KID earlier. Sam's eyes widen with awareness. He OPENS it, registers the final line of the message...

I look forward to hearing your feedback bro. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Cheers,

The Kid

It was here all along... feedback. With trepidation, Sam's thumb hovers over the REPLY button...

He TAPS it. Hesitates. Looks back to the balloon toss -- Derek is laughing, content, without him.

And so Sam looks back to the REPLY box and TYPES a note...

Take me to the premiere. A beat. He hits SEND.

Because every movie needs a little studio interference.

EXT. GRAUMAN CHINESE THEATER - HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - NIGHT

BOOM. A glowing MARQUEE LIGHTS UP!

"CAPTAIN QUEER WORLD PREMIERE"
"IN HONOR OF THE LATE ROCKY JONES"

All of Hollywood descends upon the red carpet. PHOTOGRAPHERS shout as STARS strike poses against a Rocky Jones backdrop, each adorned with rainbow accents -- vibrant pins, handkerchiefs, ties.

A barrage of white flashes and camera clicks fire off relentlessly, nearly deafening, as a FLASH CUT REVEALS --

Sam, donned in a tuxedo, standing at the carpet's center. A beat, before he grins, reveling in the spotlight as the CAMERA FLASHES roar on, intensifying until --

HORNSBY (PRELAP)
Good evening. Thank you for
joining us on this solemn
occasion.

INT. CINEMA - GRAUMAN CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

SILENCE. In a packed cinema auditorium. Not an empty seat in the house. Hornsby's on stage, mic in hand, below the silver screen.

HORNSBY
My name is Jim Hornsby, and it is
my great honor to welcome you to
the LA premiere of Silverhead
Studio's *Captain Queer*!

The crowd erupts into applause. Sam, lingering in the shadows, watches on from backstage.

HORNSBY

To kick off this evening's festivities, allow me to introduce my friend, the driving force behind this film from its conception to tonight, and the future of Silverhead Studios himself...

Sam takes that in. His eyes gleam, emotional. Mission accomplished.

HORNSBY

SAM FELDSTEIN!

Sam emerges from the shadows and into the light as the audience CLAPS, hesitant. He shakes Hornsby's hand and accepts the mic.

SAM

Thank you -- thank you very much.

The clapping dwindles fast.

SAM

Thank you Jim, for your kind introduction.

(beat)

Tonight, we gather not only to honor a Hollywood icon... tonight, we gather to make cinematic history.

More applause for this.

SAM

Our industry is changing, my friends. Our world is changing, right before our eyes. And while I can't predict the future, if today is a reminder of anything -- it's that tomorrow is never promised. So while we're fortunate enough to be here, I encourage you to sit back, relax -- and enjoy the show!

Louder CLAPPING now, among cheers and hollers for Rocky. Sam steps off the stage and navigates to the FRONT ROW where he finds --

A pocket of four empty seats RESERVED for THE FELDSTEIN FAMILY. He brushes this off, and sits alone, as the lights go down.

DA- DA! The call of TRIUMPHANT HORNS arrives with the opening SILVERHEAD SPIRAL LOGO on the cinema screen, before an OPENING IMAGE lands [*Captain Queer* scenes indicated with *ITALICS*]:

40,000 feet, high up in the thunderous, dark clouds. Pops of lightning, scattered and bright. The danger zone. No one should fly through this.

But then a 747 soars into view.

INT. 747 - NIGHT - THAT MOMENT

A flash of WHITE through the window. Violent TURBULENCE inside like a boat in stormy water.

Whiskey sloshes over the rim of a glass. Clammy hands grip arm rests, shaking.

Passengers are on the edge of their seats.

INT. CINEMA - GRAUMAN CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT - THAT MOMENT

Audience members are on the edge of their seats.

Passengers HEAVE, nauseous. Others CRY, hysterical. Others PRAY, whispers to God, close on their lips.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE PLANE AND CINEMA

We LAND on Rocky in the aisle seat. The cinema applauds at his first appearance on screen!

We HOLD on Sam in the audience, watching on. Knowing what's next, he anticipates the:

SAM

Boom.

BOOM! A STEWARDESS breaks through the COCKPIT door to see --

Both PILOTS laying unconscious, incapacitated, to a ringing MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY! Horrified, she turns back to the cabin -- with a line we may recognize:

STEWARDESS

There's no one flying the plane!

SHRIEKS of panic erupt. CRIES to God in every row as POOM! AIR MASKS drop from above. Like that'll save them.

An ALTITUDE meter in free-fall -- 3,000 -- 2,000 -- 800 FEET...

BOOM! The CABIN'S air pressure destabilizes as an EMERGENCY EXIT door is opened. PASSENGERS lose consciousness...

PULL UP. PULL UP. PULL UP -- and just as all hope is lost, we REVEAL --

Rocky Jones, dressed as CAPTAIN QUEER, floating sky-high while single-handedly holding the weight of the 747 under a vivid rainbow arcing above. The trademark image from the movie's now familiar poster.

The cinema's audience explodes!

As the crowd cheers for Rocky Jones as Captain Queer, breathing alive and well on the screen at twenty-four frames a second...

... we stay with Sam, as his eyes well up, and his failure settles in. He looks to the empty seats at his side. And while the applause carries on for Rocky, uproarious and approving, Sam seethes with discomfort.

Eager for relief, he pulls out his PHONE... opens The Kid's EMAIL... and replies with another note:

Maybe a flashback with Rocky?

EXT. AMALFI COAST - ITALY - SUNSET

A convertible glides on coastal curves at sunset; Sam drives, Rocky's beside him. Both exude a quiet peace. The ethereal sky is in hues of pink and mauve. Sam's got his hands through Rocky's sea-tousled hair.

Salty skin, sandy residue, taut collarbones framed by bright tees Sam wouldn't be caught dead in at home. Yet this is his true self, lighter and freer, away from the prying eyes of the wolves at home.

Their eyes lock, smiles exchanged, an unspoken, private memory.

EXT. THE DOCKS - AMALFI COAST - ITALY - DUSK

Sam and Rocky walk along the squeaking docks, boats rocking and creaking, as the space between the two men close. The night is quiet and soft.

Rocky holds out a hand, but Sam takes a finger. Other COUPLES pass and Sam releases it, quick. Rocky notices.

EXT. LOOKOUT - AMALFI COAST - ITALY - NIGHT

Sam and Rocky lean against a cobblestone ledge overlooking the ocean at night with a space between them. Rocky looks over to Sam, but Sam keeps his eyes trained forward, lost in thought.

Crawling in his own skin.

And so he reaches for his PHONE, yet again, and replies to The Kid with a:

something that doesn't make me feel so... small

Sam's shrunken silhouette stands against the vastness of night and a cosmos of stars blanketing the sky. He hits *SEND*.

INT. HORNSBY'S OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - DAY

Sam, sharp-suited, looms large over Hollywood, in Hornsby's corner office. The box seat from heaven. He recognizes this view.

He eyes the plebeian ants, stuck in traffic thirty stories below. Making progress towards meetings that won't make progress for them.

He turns back to survey the room -- now filled with *his* family photos and accolades on display. This room, like Hornsby before him, reeks of accomplishment.

Outside his space he spots MOVERS boxing Natalie's office. He catches her slumping into the ELEVATOR, defeated. She makes eye contact with Sam as the metal doors close.

He sits, makes himself comfortable. A beat. He adjusts the chair for height -- Hornsby was taller.

He glances up -- *shit*, INTERNS noticed. Embarrassed, he locates a remote on his desk, taps. The curtains BUZZ shut on the wrong window. He points around, corrects it.

BBBBZZZZZ -- now the right curtains crawl to a close, as ASSISTANTS disappear from view and Sam feigns busyness.

It's darker in here now. Feels smaller too. Secluded, he takes in the new space. *Quiet*.

His eyes drift to the family WATERFALL photo on his desk. Once joyful, the family's smiles now look unsettlingly hollow.

He turns it face down, can't bear it.

A pile of scripts are stacked high on his desk. He takes a pen, scans through a few covers... *THE POSEIDON ERASURE. THE DUCHESS OF SCRUBS.*

He tosses them aside, disinterested.

His pen taps the desk. *TAP TAP TAP TAP.*

He eyes the TICKING CLOCK. *TICK TICK TICK TICK.*

He looks to his monitor, wiggles his mouse alive, REVEALING an INBOX flooded with hundreds of UNREAD emails: CONGRATULATIONS, ADULATIONS, verbal MASTURBATIONS, and oh so many ASKS.

A moment, as he considers something.

Then he locates the thread with The Kid. Hesitant, he HITS REPLY.

The cursor awaits his input, blinking.

BLINK. BLINK. BLINK. BLINK. Taunting him with anticipation.

His fingers move to the keys. He pauses, before slowly typing a...

What's next?

Because even this, here at the very top, is not enough. He eyes the SEND button, ashamed.

CLICKS IT.

CUE MUSIC: THE NATIONAL'S 'WEIRD GOODBYES (FT. BON IVER)'

[NOTE: THE FOLLOWING SEQUENCE CONTAINS NO DIALOGUE]

INT/EXT - VARIOUS - A COLLAGE of CLOSING IMAGES - DAY/NIGHT

A BLACK CROW whisks through traffic, palm trees, homeless encampments, SNAPSHOTS of Los Angeles at sunset arriving at --

A Captain Queer wall mural dropping into view along the side of the Roosevelt Hotel.

Cash registers whir. Ticket stubs for 'Queer' spit out.

Rainbow costumed audiences fill cinemas nationwide. Wide eyes peer up the silver screen.

SUITS check opening weekend grosses. Glimpses of dollar signs, zeros, 'Queer' RECORDS being set.

CHAMPAGNE bottles pop. In RESTAURANT BOOTHS, HOTSHOT bro agents celebrate. YOUNG WOMEN fawn after them.

INT/EXT. BMW - FELDSTEIN MANSION - NIGHT

Sam, feeling the cut, is at the wheel of his BMW, creeping past his old house. Through the atrium's window, he clocks Nina and the kids sitting around the table with Lance, laughing. They seem at peace without him. A gut punch.

He looks away, as the car carries him forward.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - BAR - NIGHT

He lifts his head from his hands. He scans his surroundings --

He's at the end of a bar, hunched over a counter. A WHISKEY GLASS before him. He hesitates, before sipping. Clocks eyes are watching him from across the bar --

A SINGLE MAN (50s), desiring, concealed.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Bare feet on a hotel carpet. Briefs are pulled up a leg.

Door hinge CRACKS open. The SINGLE MAN, under the sheets, disappears as the entrance closes on him, firm.

Sam meanders down the hotel corridor alone, unmoored.

It's as if he is gliding through existence but has lost the desire to resist.

EXT. TCL CHINESE THEATER - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Blue collar workers on ladders are at the marquee, removing the letters of 'Queer'.

EXT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - DAY - THAT MOMENT

The Captain Queer wall mural is removed to make way for what's next.

INT. THE POLO LOUNGE - BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING - LATER

An EGG-WHITE FRITTATA slides into view on a table. Sam's back in the best booth of the bustling LA breakfast spot.

Some NEW THING (20s) sits opposite him, in the throes of some pitch we can't hear but can imagine. Distracted, Sam's hands move to his --

EXT. SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - BURBANK - MORNING - LATER

-- now stubbly face. He felt that cut, and the weight of time it glommed on to him.

He's on the back of a GOLF CART being wheeled through the studio lot. A NEW FEMALE ASSISTANT (20s), tablet in hand, briefs him through his day. Sam looks up to see --

INT. BOARDROOM - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - MORNING - LATER

Dan and Harry pitching a new project, yet another attempt at bat. Sam's at the head of the boardroom table. SUITS around take notes.

Dan and Harry blab on, animated. On the slideshow screen is a HOT BABE flickering under the projector's light.

INT. FELDSTEIN MANSION - BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING - LATER

AMY, a little older now too, sprints furiously on the treadmill, chasing a body she'll never have.

INT. NOBU - BEVERLY HILLS - NIGHT - LATER

DEREK, a little older now too, fills a booth at Nobu with a posse of his awful pubescent friends. They signal a WAITER and bark off orders.

EXT. NOBU - BEVERLY HILLS - NIGHT - LATER

A BMW waits outside. Derek pops the passenger door open. SAM (even older) is at the wheel, picking him up.

INT/EXT. BMW - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT - LATER

While Sam is at the wheel, the car moves as if it's on autopilot. He turns to his side, registers --

Derek keeping his attention out the window.

Words hang on the tip of Sam's tongue, but none escape, and so Sam looks back out the window as the city lights streak past, in a fleeting glow...

INT/EXT - VARIOUS - A COLLAGE of CLOSING IMAGES - DAY/NIGHT

SEX WORKERS congregate on shadowy city blocks. CONVERTIBLES linger nearby. CASH trades hands.

COMICS on stage hustle for laughs. FACES in the audience return looks of boredom.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - BAR - NIGHT - YEARS LATER

Sam raises his head, grayer, heavier. He's back at the end of a bar, hunched over a counter. A WHISKEY GLASS before him. He sips, clocks eyes are watching him from across the bar --

A DIFFERENT SINGLE MAN (50s), desiring, concealed.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Bare feet on a hotel carpet. Briefs are pulled up a leg.

The MAN disappears behind a door closed, firm.

Sam meanders down the hotel corridor alone, unmoored.

INT. THE POLO LOUNGE - BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING

An EGG-WHITE FRITTATA slides into view, before a waiter's hand places a cup of GOAT CHEESE on its side. Sam forks a bite.

EXT. SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - BURBANK - MORNING

Sam, visibly heavier, is planted on the back of a golf cart. ANOTHER NEW FEMALE ASSISTANT (20s), tablet in hand, briefs him through his day.

INT. SHOOTING STAGE - BURBANK - MORNING

A crop of a dozen attractive, shirtless YOUNG MEN (20s) stand in a row in front of a white backdrop as a CASTING AGENT (40s) paces, inspecting them. CREW MEMBERS rush about, a shoot in progress.

Sam inspects them from the shadows. One of the boys meets his eyes.

INT. SHOOTING STAGE - BURBANK - MORNING - LATER

That SAME BOY (20s) is suspended on wires above wrecked cars on a blue screen stage.

INT. HAIR AND MAKEUP - BURBANK - DAY - LATER

That SAME BOY sits in a makeup chair as a crew swiftly brushes his face.

INT. COSTUMING - BURBANK - DAY - LATER

That SAME BOY stands shirtless in T-pose as a crew sprays him with oil.

EXT. SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - BURBANK - DAY - LATER

Sam considers the door of a STUDIO TRAILER. He weighs his fist. Takes a beat.

KNOCKS three times.

EXT. ROOSEVELT HOTEL - SUNSET

A NEW SUPERHERO wall mural featuring that SAME BOY drops into view along the side of the Roosevelt Hotel.

INT/EXT - VARIOUS - A COLLAGE of CLOSING IMAGES - DAY/NIGHT

Cash registers hold still. A TICKET STUB or two is printed.

A half empty cinema. KIDS glow against their phones in hand, scrolling. JADED eyes up on the screen.

SUITS check grosses. WALL STREET BROKERS on the floor pout.

That SAME BOY'S wall mural is removed as fast as it went up.

INT. TRENDY RESTAURANT - HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT - YEARS LATER

WE CIRCLE a bustling restaurant table: AMY (20s), laughs beside her BOYFRIEND (22); NINA, (60s, age-defying and Botoxed), with LANCE's hand on hers; before we land on SAM (60s), awkward and out of place.

A meet and greet unfolds. But Sam just looks to his HANDS, now withered with time...

INT/EXT. HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

Sam's in the back of an Uber staring out a window.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS chisel away at concrete. YOUNG PEOPLE wait outside windows for their tables to be ready. HOMELESS PEOPLE wait on sidewalks for change in their buckets.

INT. THE POLO LOUNGE - BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING - LATER

An EGG WHITE FRITTATA, now sprinkled with GOAT CHEESE, slides into view.

EXT. SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - BURBANK - MORNING - LATER

SAM (later 60s) spreads wide on the back of a golf cart as he's wheeled through the lot and a NEW FEMALE ASSISTANT (20s) blabs on.

INT. SAM'S NEW OFFICE - SILVERHEAD STUDIOS - AFTERNOON - LATER

A pen taps against the desk. Sam sits in his office chair, bored. The city of dreams is obstructed here, swallowed whole by an orange hellscape.

EXT. YACHT - MALDIVES - AFTERNOON - YEARS LATER

The hull of a YACHT rocks against the waves. Sam, a tomato, roasts in the sun in a chair on deck.

He glances to his own body with disgust. When did it all go...

EXT. GRAVEYARD - LOS ANGELES - LATER

JIM HORNSBY's name is etched into a tombstone. Very few gather in the rain to bid goodbye.

Sam stands in an oversized suit under an umbrella. Where did it all go...

INT. GRAND AUDITORIUM - HOTEL - BEVERLY HILLS - LATER

SAM (70S) and NINA (70s) are walking AMY (late 20s) down the aisle. The BOYFRIEND we glimpsed earlier waits under the chuppah.

Sam meets eyes with DEREK (20s, overweight), sitting in the FRONT ROW.

Sam halts. Amy and Nina stop, puzzled. Disoriented, he scans the room, faces watching. Nina nudges him on. He resumes walking. How did it all go...

INT. PARTY ROOM - HOTEL - BEVERLY HILLS - LATER

Sam sits at the head table alone as he watches Lance twirl Amy on the DANCE FLOOR. Why did it all go...

INT. BAR - HOTEL - LATER

Older Sam raises his head. He's back at the end of a bar, hunched over a counter. A WHISKEY GLASS before him. He sips, clocks eyes are watching him from across the bar --

An OLDER MAN (70s), desiring, concealed.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - HOTEL - NIGHT

Bare feet on a hotel carpet. Briefs are pulled up a leg, with effort now.

The OLDER MAN disappears behind a door closed, firm.

Old Sam, bearing the weight of a lifetime compressed to a series of cuts etched like scars into his being, meanders down the hallway, unmoored.

INT/EXT - VARIOUS - A COLLAGE of CLOSING IMAGES - DAY/NIGHT

GLOWING MARQUEES die. NEON zaps to black. CAR SMOKE plumes to fog. SHOT GLASSES are settled on bar counters. HOT GIRLS puke into alleyways. RICH THINGS wait for Ubers. CIVILIANS wait at bus stops.

And Sam lies awake in bed.

SUNS rise. BREAKFASTS slide. HANDS shake. BANK ACCOUNTS pop. SPREADSHEETS drop.

And Sam's eyes glaze over.

CREW LIGHTS strike on, MAKEUP brushes guck, SILHOUETTES pose, CAMERAS run, FOOTAGE splices, PROJECTORS whir.

And Sam's eyes go still.

BILLBOARDS go up, BILLBOARDS go down, STARS rise, STARS fall. AWARDS gleam, SCANDALS break.

And Sam's eyes well with tears.

PENS write, KEYBOARDS click, LETTERS appear, LETTERS delete, PAPERS print, EMAILS whoosh, REPLIES arrive, FOLLOWUPS annoy, NOTES arrive, PENS write, KEYBOARDS click, a SCENE HEADING types into view --

INT. THE POLO LOUNGE - BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING

An EGGS BENEDICT, drenched in hollandaise, slides into view.

OLD SAM (80) is in the worst booth of a bustling LA breakfast spot by the toilets. Elsewhere, POWER PLAYERS and EARLY RISERS plot takeovers over turkey bacon and green juice.

Sam eyes the oozing Benedict... pushes it away.

THE KID (O.C.)

Looks off the charts good bro.

Sam perks up. The Kid, still 25, has just slid into the booth with him.

THE KID

Figured you could use some company.

Sam glances away, takes in the scene. Notices that his former seat is now occupied by some newer hotter EXEC (40s) being pitched to.

SAM

So this is how it ends, huh. Right at the beginning?

THE KID

Yes. The natural cycle of life -- and death.

SAM

I thought maybe you'd give me a different ending.

THE KID

No. It always ends this way.

Sam's attentions drifts elsewhere -- handshakes. Laughter. Negotiations unfolding in every corner.

THE KID

It's funny, Sam. I know the feeling. Like when you sit to watch something you've already seen a million times.

(beat)

You know the ending, all too well, and could even recite every line, but you're so caught up in the action that you think -- hell, what if it ends differently this time?

(MORE)

THE KID (CONT'D)

(beat)

And yet, it never does -- yet we
keep believing.

SAM

But what if I had done things
differently?

THE KID

It's the question that keeps us
moving. It gives us hope, and
drives us mad -- what if? What if?
What if?

(beat)

Yet why wait for the cut to black
to simply accept -- *what is?*

Sam takes this in. The pauses between lines are long now,
palpable. His voice cracks, afraid:

SAM

... then what's next?

THE KID

... I think you know.

The Kid places his hand upon Sam's. Sam's tears unload.

SAM

... we cut to black?

THE KID

Yes.

SAM

And what happens after?

THE KID

Applause... then credits.

Anxious, Sam reaches for the Benedict. Takes a generous bite.

SAM

(chewing)

So this is it. There's nothing
else?

THE KID

Well, I'd hope we live on in their
imagination. If we did something
right.

SAM

Whose imagination?

THE KID
The audience, of course!

Sam swallows. He pushes away the Benedict. Wipes his tears, insecure, aware of prying eyes. Self-image remaining even in the face of oblivion.

SAM
(whispers)
... they're watching right now?

THE KID
Yes! We should probably wrap it up. Some of them might have to take a leak.

SAM
... they've been watching this whole time?

THE KID
I mean, hopefully... coulda glanced at their phones once or twice, but... ideally not!

Sam shifts in his seat, hesitating...

SAM
... how did I do?

THE KID
Well, I love you like a child, Sam. So you could do no wrong in my eyes... but really, there's only one Judge that matters here. And it isn't God. Just a man with a bladder!

SAM
What if they think I'm a terrible person?

THE KID
Fuck, Sam, I've got no control over what they think! Let's wrap this up, shall we?

SAM
What should I do?

THE KID
Just sit there, my friend. Leave the rest to me.

Sam attempts to relax. Closes his eyes, exhales.

THE KID
Alright, Sam. It's been a
privilege, and an honor.

A long moment, as Sam trembles, before we --

~~CUT TO BLA~~

SAM
Wait, wait, wait.

He opens his eyes.

THE KID
Yes?

SAM
... I'm not ready.

THE KID
No one ever is.

SAM
... what will it feel like?

THE KID
Well -- there will be no you to
feel such a thing.

SAM
That's pretty bleak, Kid.

THE KID
No, that's life. Well... death
actually. There's only one way out
of this movie, Sam.

Sam inhales, exhales.... inhales, exhales...

A thought occurs to him. A long beat, before:

SAM
... hey, Kid.

THE KID
Yes, Sam?

SAM
If I was able to... I'd make an
offer on your script.

THE KID
Wow.

SAM

You know, I fuckin' hated you in what feels like just this morning but -- well. If I'm being honest... I think you're a real talent.

The Kid wipes a tear, emotional.

THE KID

That means the world, Sam. And considering they're watching now... looks like someone made an offer after all.

SAM

Congrats, buddy.

THE KID

Thanks, Sam.

SAM

It's a miracle when anything gets made. Don't take it for granted.

THE KID

I don't, Sam.

A beat.

SAM

... and Kid?

THE KID

Yes, Sam?

Sam breaks eye contact, further conceding...

SAM

I wouldn't exist without you. So... thanks for giving me life.

THE KID

It was my honor.

SAM

I know I've given you a hard time, but... seriously. I'm grateful. For the time. And consideration.

THE KID

No, Sam. Thank you.

They lock eyes. Sam, tensing, braces for what's next...

SAM

Okay. Do it, do it, fuck, fuck, do it. Just get it over with.

THE KID

Alright, Sam. It's been a privilege, and an honor.

(beat)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sam closes his aged old eyes.

We hold close on his face for some time, trembling with anticipation.

He inhales... exhales... inhales... exhales...

The restaurant's ambience fades...

Shorter breaths now -- in, out, in, out, in, out, in --

His breath steadies.

His trembling stops.

The restaurant has gone dead silent.

He settles into his seat.

From silence, the sound of CLAPPING emerges... gaining momentum...

INT. CINEMA - GRAUMAN CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

... swelling louder now, the sound intensifies... UNTIL --

Sam's younger eyes snap open.

The APPLAUSE is seismic, deafening.

We stay tight on Sam as he clocks a surrounding standing ovation, while people gesture him to stand.

He rises and turns back to face the crowd.

And in the final moments of his life, just seconds before he will cease to exist for all eternity, Sam stands alone against an audience erupting with applause. Recognizing this moment, he waves back... and manages to crack a smile.

CUT TO BLACK