

# One

Written  
by  
Nile Ford

BLACK

In the dark, we hear a young man speaking; the summation of a life lesson...

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Sometimes it takes the bad to bring out the good. The negative to bring out the positive. I mean, consider horse sh... Consider manu... Consider fertilizer. ...Somebody ought'a write a book about it. Not fertilizer, but that sometimes it takes the bad to bring out the good. ...Sure I knew the mud was gonna hit the fan. I just didn't know how much. And for how long.

INT. BAR - MORNING

Somewhere in Hollywood. CLIFFORD TREADWELL is jaw-boning, entertaining the other A.M. PATRONS. At 25, he's a naive, shirt-off-his-back type with just enough hard bark on him to keep him in the game. His clothes, jewelry, flashy. New flash, like the semi-goofy pride that goes with it. His charm however, indeed his salvation, lies in his smile. It's that angelic smile distinctive to those rare souls who seem to see the best in everyone.

But right now, Cliff's trying to hide his own angst from the others. Maybe even from himself.

CLIFF

He was a man of... a little dignity. Very little. And what little he did have, he sure wasn't gonna waste on us. 'Bastard', this was his name around the office.

The morning manics chortle. They seem to think he's a 'somebody'.

Cliff pulls out his RINGING CELLPHONE. His expression shunts 180 as he looks at the number display. Quick glance at watch, shuts, pockets phone -- all gone presto. Gets up. Casually.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Water bill! Hit me again, Clyde.

BARTENDER pulls another Bud from the cooler and a glass as Cliff heads for the men's room.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

As Cliff enters and slinks into the cubicle, the 'good-time' expression slides off his face revealing the worry riding him. He pulls an unopened fifth of whiskey from his coat pocket, opens it... downs some.

From the shiver and scowl it's clear he doesn't do this. He 'bravely' tips bottle again, ignorant of how much does what, a brave, ignorant, bitter grimace as it chugs down.

INT. BAR - DAY

As Cliff comes out of the can and strides back to bar, the liquor climbs into his head, registering a grin this side of Dorkville.

1ST PATRON

Cliff, you know Spears, right? Ever met Pitt or Cage?

CLIFF

Yes, and both. Funny you should ask that because just the other day...

His cheeks suddenly bloat like he's belching. But he's not belching. Poor Cliff swallows hard; must be somebody.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(looking at watch)

'Time is it? Oh jeez, I ga'a go!

And out he trots.

EXT. BAR - DAY

With deep breaths Cliff manages to keep his breakfast down; but as he starts down the stairs, he trips, spills to the street like a sack of spuds.

He gets up, unfazed at 25. But there's a cut on his temple.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Cliff swaggers along Melrose toward a parking lot, the weight of his problem boring through his buzz. An uptown COUPLE have their laugh at him as they pass.

Across the street, a MAN operates a pile driver in a cordoned off section of sidewalk...

In a freak occurrence, a chip of brick flies out of the safety area like a bullet toward Cliff -- just as Cliff awkwardly stoops to give a HOMELESS MAN some change. The brick chip ruffles the hair at the back of Cliff's head, then flies on, busting against the base of a streetlight. An easy law suit for the taking, except no one sees it.

INT. CLIFF'S CAR - DAY

Cliff sits in his new Jaguar trying to put the key in the ignition. But now, from his viewpoint, the whole dash looks like a sky blue magic carpet. After a few more attempts, he heaves sigh and gets out.

INT. TAXI CAB - MOVING - DAY

Cliff, riding in the back seat, takes his ringing CELL out yet again, squints to see the number. Shuts it.

He starts talking to himself, working his rubbery mouth trying to pronounce words clearly, but they slur. He sees two identical coffee houses up ahead. Inherently knowing they're really just one, he gestures to driver...

CLIFF  
Pull up in there.

EXT. COFFEE DRIVE-THRU - DAY

The cab pulls up. Cliff rolls down window.

CLIFF  
Espresso. Quart.

EXT. STUDIO GATE - DAY - LATER

Cliff's cab edges up to the gate of a tv and movie studio. As car pulls up, the GATE KEEPER does a double-take on Cliff, sees the blood running down his cheek.

CLIFF  
You should see the open gate. Ha ha  
ha! Other the guy, will ya?

The keeper's face puzzles as he reluctantly lets them through. Cab coasts toward main bldg.

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - DAY

Cab pulls into lot. Cliff gets out, pays driver, walks toward main bldg. Coffee's done little to ease the wharf-walk.

INT. MAIN BUILDING - DAY

Cliff trudges through the doors, blood dripping off his chin, cheek ruddy and swelling, shirt torn. People he knows stop and stare. He tries to hide his face with his hand as he angles for the stairway and climbs up to...

INT. MAIN BUILDING - SECOND FLOOR - DAY

The production offices. Cliff pops a Juicy Fruit as he plods through the hall. LINDA LIPSHITZ comes out of one of the offices. The nerdy-cute 23 year old redhead sees Cliff and skirts to meet him...

LINDA  
I've been trying to reach you.  
It's... It's bad, Cliff. Really  
bad. Worse than you...  
(seeing the blood)  
My god! What happened?

CLIFF  
'Tripped, I'm ok. Go ahead.

She scruples like a poor swimmer on the high board.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
Come on!

LINDA  
Five share.

Cliff freezes, like he's just been shot. And with a sober bullet.

CLIFF  
Fi... It's over. I'm finished.

Linda consoles, pats his back. Cliff walks, straighter, down the hall, pep-talks self...

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
It's not over, I'm... fricken warrior!  
...only to stop and agonize some more...

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
It's the kiss of death. Nobody'll want anything to do with me.  
...Laughing stock!

LINDA  
Cliff, don't do this to yourself.

On down the hall...

CLIFF  
Thirteenth youngest producer ever.  
Third rated show after just one season?! Hmph! There's plenty more where that came from! ...No there's not! I'm over!

He stops. She broods.

LINDA  
...Smallberg wants to see you in his office the minute you come in.

CLIFF  
He said it like that? "The minute" I come in?

She can't tell him 'no', so she turns away.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
The sadist. Well, I can't like this! Look at me!

He treks toward his office, Linda hurrying alongside.

LINDA

You're right, we'll get you cleaned up first. Where did you fall?

CLIFF

I didn't fall. I tripped I said!

INT. BEN SMALLBERG'S OFFICE - DAY - LATER

Cliff, cleaned up but still a bruised wreck, sits at the receiving end of a huge oak desk. BEN SMALLBERG, a handsome, lean, calculating, salt-and-pepper haired man in his 50's sits stoically across from him, glaring at him between sips of bottled water.

SMALLBERG

Tripped huh? Tsch! How many flights?

CLIFF

Yeah, ha! Frequent flyer miles...

SMALLBERG

...Anyway, simple math.

CLIFF

Listen, I think these ratings are just a temporary bump in the...

SMALLBERG

'Not a debate!'

Cliff goes silent, his smile infested with resign. Blood escapes from the band-aide on his temple.

Smallberg gets up, walks around, stopping behind Cliff to feed his rumblefish. He seems to be enjoying this.

SMALLBERG (CONT'D)

Watch the blood, will ya?

Embarrassed, Cliff takes out handkerchief, blots face.

SMALLBERG (CONT'D)

I left it for you to tell them. They're giving you two days to get your stuff out of the office. They want to paint before...

CLIFF

What color?

SMALLBERG

There's nothing I can do, you know that, so skip all the bullshit and let's get it over with.

CLIFF

That's all it means to you?! Almost two years! I thought we were...

SMALLBERG

'You losing your hearing now along with your job? I said skip it!

Cliff Treadwell stands, bloody but unbowed.

CLIFF

Ok, screw you also, ok, pal? Whoever the hell you are.

He heads for the door.

SMALLBERG

Well, if you want to make it personal... I should never have taken you on! You don't belong in this business. You're a fluke. A fuckin' lottery winner. You had one good idea! Ok? One! It's all you'll ever have and it just got old! So hit the fuckin' road, 'pal'!

CLIFF

Third rated show! 'Took you five years to do that! I did it in a single season!

SMALLBERG

You mean "I" did it for you. It was my expertise. But it's much more simple than that, Treadwell.

(sitting)

Look who's sitting at his desk, look who's walking out the fuckin' door.

Cliff exits, SLAMMING the very same DOOR.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Cliff hobbles down the hall, angst growing, confidence gone. He stops, looks down the hall. Coast is clear. He steps back and kicks the wall with all he's got. No effect on the wall. But in the beat, all the consequences travel up Cliff's synapses, finally bellowing from his mouth in a shrill...

CLIFF

Aaaaaaooooowwww!!!

...which he tries to stifle as he continues along his way. Limping now.

He finally arrives at a door with a banner that reads; For Love and Money. He takes a deep breath and goes in.

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

As Cliff enters, he's overwhelmed by a sea of weary faces. 27 PEOPLE, staring up at him from their desks, waiting to hear what they basically already know. He walks to the center of the room, gestures indicating his bruises...

CLIFF

Ben met me at the gate.

Nobody gets it.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

...The good news is, you guys are some of the best people in the business. ...The bad news, it's a crazy business. The show's canceled.

A woman next to him breaks out in tears. Another giggles nervously. A man in the back growls a denunciation. Some pack their things. Cliff consoles the woman mourning.

INT. CLIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Cliff slumps at desk. Linda enters with a stack of files, holds them up in a question.

CLIFF

Trash 'em.

LINDA

Are you sure you're going to be ok?

He glares at her. She puts the files in the trash and exits.

Move to reveal files in bin. The top sheet is visible and title reads: "For Love and Money". Below that, photos of beautiful women, each with names and stats -- Measurements -- Hobbies -- Astrological Signs -- Fantasy Dates...

As Cliff stares at the trashed files, his eyes begin to tear.

FLASHBACK

INT. SMALLBERG'S OFFICE - REMEMBERED NIGHT

There's a casual party going on with PRODUCERS, other EXECS and STAFF. Cliff's the centerpiece, having his moment. Decked out in fancy tux, he's the handsome charismatic winner he used to be just weeks ago. He sits with Smallberg and paunched, tanned studio head, ART P. MONEY.

In the jovial banter, Smallberg raises his champagne glass to toast, and the others follow suit.

SMALLBERG

Brilliant idea you had, Treadwell.

(MORE)



SMALLBERG (CONT'D)  
 Highest I.Q. male with the hottest  
 hottie. To the man of the hour!

MONEY  
 'Man of the season!

They all drink to Cliff.

OUT OF FLASHBACK

INT. CLIFF'S OFFICE - DAY - RETURN TO PRESENT TIME

Cliff sits alone at his desk in the center of a bunch of packed boxes. He's devastated, all caved in, wet-faced, gnawing his knuckle as if it could stop the pain.

Move to reveal Linda behind the door, watching in sympathy.

INT. OFFICE - JEWELRY STORE - DAY

ALFRED NESTOR, mustachioed man of 56 in three-piece sits at desk reading newspaper. We see the high end shop through his open door. Finding what he was looking for, he picks up his phone.

NESTOR  
 (into phone)  
 Cindy, get him on the line. That  
 dumb show's dead.

INT. CLIFF'S JAG - MOVING - DAY

Cliff, back in his Jag, ubersober, prattling...

CLIFF  
 Don't worry, honey. It's nothing.  
 I understand Fox is looking for  
 someone. And I'll give Burnette a  
 call. We've talked at length. We're  
 on the same page.

His CELL RINGS. He looks to see who... ignores it.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 He may even say let's keep the show.  
 Just... dress it up a little and...

EXT. CLIFF'S MANSION - DAY

An immodest estate on a hill in the clouds. Cliff pulls into the driveway and parks. He gets out, grabs his briefcase and pads to the entrance. He grabs the doorknob and turns. Locked. He knocks.

CLIFF  
 It's me, honey.

He waits. Doesn't hear anything. He takes out his key and unlocks the door.

INT. CLIFF'S MANSION - DAY

Cliff enters and closes the door behind him...

CLIFF  
Poodlekins?

Throws his briefcase on a chair...

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
Me, honey.

Scuffs through the foyer, across a sprawling living room...

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
...Hon?

Patters toward the chef's kitchen...

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
Where are you, love?

Suddenly -- A SHOT IS FIRED! -- chipping the baccarat vase on the shelf behind Cliff. He ducks, looks in the direction of the shot.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
What the fu... ?!

Standing in the living room hallway, WENDY WAINWRIGHT holds the smoking gun. A 24-year-old platinum blonde in the mold of the 30's leading lady, all pink flamingo's and lazy vases. She's out of Cliff's league, but for his short-lost luck with worldly riches. She's trembling, wet with tears, her perfect pouty lips purpled from a mixture of too much blow and menstrual rage.

She covers herself from the cold with her robe and aims again at Cliff.

WENDY  
Bastard!

She fires ANOTHER SHOT, shatters Cliff's modest media award on the same shelf.

CLIFF  
Wendy! What the hell are you doing?!  
I thought you were gonna ease up on  
the powder.

Cliff starts darting around in Wendy's shooting gallery as another SHOT is fired... BANG-THWING!! The Swiss grandfather in the corner retires.

WENDY

Powder my ass!

CLIFF

I guess you heard then about my...

WENDY

LOSER!!

A unlikely baritone coming out of her in the admonition.  
She steps toward him for a better go. POW!

CLIFF

Wendy Wendy Wendy... Look, my fret  
Burnette, Fox, loves me the show!  
Keep me dress it up a bit!

TOW TOW!!

WENDY

You're a fucking loser and I've been  
wasting my time here! ...Never gonna  
get me my shot!

She fires... CLICK?! Empty chamber. Cliff peeks out from  
his hiding place, watches her click another empty. He stands,  
strides toward her. She starts backing away.

WENDY (CONT'D)

What? What are you doing? Stay  
away from me!

She throws the pistol at him. It hits him in the head.  
Stops him briefly. He wipes to see if there's blood.  
Satisfied, he hurries toward her. She runs into the  
munificent hallway, and he in after her.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Wendy sprints for the stairway at the end of the hall.  
Cliff's gaining.

WENDY

I didn't mean it! What are you gonna  
do to me?

CLIFF

Attempted fricken murder? You'll  
have to ask the judge about that.

Wendy trips on her way up the stairs. She bumps her head in  
the fall. Cliff hurries to her, kneels.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Are you alright?

She stops rubbing her head long enough to demand...

WENDY

Get off me. Leave me alone.

He grabs her, drags her to the phone in the hallway.

CLIFF

You'll be plenty alone in jail.

He pins her down on the floor by the phone stand, picks up the receiver and dials. Terrified, she starts rubbing his crotch...

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Yeah, hello, I'd like to report...

WENDY

(rubbing vigorously)

Baby.

CLIFF

Repor...

His conviction softening...

WENDY

(kneading)

Daddy.

CLIFF

Hike... to report...

WENDY

(pawing)

Daddy daddy daa-dyyy...

He bends, moaning. She keeps rubbing. He drops the phone.

CLIFF

Hngngng!

WENDY

(plying)

Daddy had such a tough day. 'Needs his baby girl.

His eyes roll up into his head. He looks down at her cleavage... drops to his knees and ravages her.

911 OPERATOR (O.S.)

Hello? ...Hello! Can you hear me...?

ESTABLISHING SHOT -- UNIVERSAL STUDIOS - ANOTHER DAY

INT. UNIVERSAL PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

Cliff is talking with FOUR mid-level PRODUCERS sitting around the room. He's nervous, incongruously ill-at-ease at this.

FIRST PRODUCER

What kind of show'd you have in mind?

CLIFF

Well... a sort of punched-up version  
of Love and Money.

They stare at him, the rhythm of the meeting skids to a halt.

ESTABLISHING SHOT -- WARNER BROTHERS STUDIOS - DAY

INT. WARNER BROTHERS PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

Cliff is with THREE MALE PRODUCERS who listen to his pitch.

PRODUCER

Uh huh. Ok. Bigger how, exactly?

CLIFF

More. Better. Prettier women,  
smarter men. Scientists maybe! And  
bigger breasts. You know, something  
the audience can really get excited  
about. Ha ha ha!

All three men look blankly at him.

ESTABLISHING SHOT -- 20TH CENTURY FOX STUDIOS - DAY

INT. FOX STUDIO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

Cliff pitches TWO PRODUCERS.

CLIFF

Like runway models. And nuclear  
physicists. ...You'd be surprised  
how many graduates come out of USC  
alone. Not to mention MIT.

Cliff takes hope when one of them laughs. He looks at the  
other one, who's deadpan.

SECOND PRODUCER

We're going to pass.

ESTABLISHING SHOT -- KTLA STUDIOS - DAY

INT. KTLA STUDIO OFFICE - DAY

ONE PRODUCER listens to Cliff, glances at his watch.

CLIFF

You know, the ones you see on Showtime  
late at night. Yeah. Exotic dancers  
and say... NASA types.

GUY

What uh... I don't understand.

INT. CLIFF'S JAG - DUSK

Cliff, sitting in his car, looks at the KTLA building with disappointment. And now another look appears on his amiable face. Self-doubt. His cell rings. He looks at number. Takes this call.

CLIFF

(into phone)

Paul! Hey, bro, been tryin' to reach you. 'Was hit with some bad news. Ha ha, I'll tell you, it's scary when your dream starts turning into a nightmare. Ha ha!

ESTABLISHING SHOT -- CENTURY CITY HIGH-RISE - DUSK

PAUL (V.O.)

Yeah, I heard the bad news. 'Really sorry to hear it. I'm also sorry I've got more bad news for you.

INT. PAUL'S OFFICE - DUSK

PAUL WANYEN, 30's, knots his tie in a wall mirror. His plush office is laden with showy works of art and framed pictures of himself with celebs. He has Cliff on speaker phone...

INTERCUT

PAUL

I can't represent you anymore, Cliff.

CLIFF

What?! Paul, it's just a blip on the screen, man!

PAUL

Nooooo, where's my check?

CLIFF

Your...? I'm gonna be s...

PAUL

I don't have my check because you can't afford to give it to me, because you didn't listen to me when I told you to invest your money. And now... Well, now you're going to have to find yourself another lawyer.

CLIFF

Just like that?!

PAUL

I'm sorry. I'll have my secretary send you your bill schedule.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

You're responsible for them as of now. And forget the money you owe me. We'll just call it even. Gotta go. Good luck. Good bye, Cliff.

Paul shuts the phone off.

Cliff gorillas the steering wheel a while in frustration.

Now he sits there catching his breath, pitying himself. Finally he starts the car and drives off just as...

EXT. CLIFF'S JAG - DUSK

A speeding Maserati comes flying out of nowhere and swerves within inches of Cliff's car. But Cliff's looking the other way and the window's closed.

CLIFF (V.O.)

Couldn't we skip it this year? I'm not exactly in the mood to party, if you know what I mean.

WENDY (V.O.)

We go every year.

EXT. BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

It's like Gatsby's place. And just as crowded. Cliff's jag pulls up to the valet.

WENDY (V.O.)

Besides, I spent 3 thousand dollars on this dress.

INT. BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

This is the spot. The opulence, like a ship of treasure. Everybody's here. Celebrities, rising stars, producers, aspirants and hangers-on.

Wendy's at a bar with TWO GIRLFRIENDS who admire her dress. She looks gorgeous, even though the hair and make-up don't completely hide a mini purpling Gorbachev on her forehead.

Cliff's by the entry doors to a pool with a Goth-looking 'DIRECTOR' who laments...

GOTH DIRECTOR

Great script, 'say so myself. They're just scared. What's so repulsive about menstrual blood as war paint? They're Amazons for godsakes!

Cliff, repulsed, turns, walks away. We follow at his back and watch as what seems like everyone either turn to him and ask 'What happened?', or commiserate in his misfortune.

By the time he reaches Wendy, an embarrassed smile is frozen on his face.

WENDY

Now you look like you've got a pole  
up your ass.

Her girlfriends cackle with the quickness of Cliff's  
crimsoning face. He whispers to her.

CLIFF

I wanna get outta here! Let's go!

WENDY

I'm finishing my drink!

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - NIGHT - LATER

Like a blocked artery, filled with an inebriated gaggle of  
party warblers.

And poor Cliff, getting it from all sides now. Everyone,  
even the SHELTY on the staircase is yapping at him. 'What  
happened, Cliffy?', 'Where did you go wrong, do you think?',  
'You had to know the show couldn't last, didn't you, Cliff?',  
'What are you gonna do now?', 'Arf arf arf!!'

When Cliff moves away from them, others are there to tell  
him their successes... 'I'm going to be the new head of  
Chick Flick Productions starting Monday!' 'My husband got a  
27 percent raise! He's really coming into his own.' 'They  
just gave her her own talk show.' 'Sally won the lottery  
with 12 others and she's set for life.'

Suddenly, as if possessed, he fights his way through the  
crowd, marches toward Wendy again. He takes her by the arm,  
tugs her away from her girlfriends.

WENDY

What are you doing?!

CLIFF

I'm taking the damn yoke off. Come  
on, we're going. That's it!

WENDY

Yolk? There's food here!

CLIFF

Food? I'm talking about Vegas!

EXT. WYNN LAS VEGAS HOTEL CASINO - NIGHT

We see the red lettered advert 'WYNN' on the Steve Wynn  
megastructure. A carpet of nightlight glitters on the desert  
floor beyond.



INT. WYNN CASINO - NIGHT

It's slow. Week-night locals. But Cliff, who we find seated at a roulette table, figures time differently in his inebriated devil-may-care state. Tux crumpled, Jack Daniels shooter now faithfully at his side, he bets three hundred dollars on red.

DRRRRR... DUT DUT DUT DUT... CLICK! The ball falls in a red slot!!

Teetering up to the table, Wendy in faux fur, martini in hand. She wriggles her way next to Cliff, her breasts rubbing up against his arm as he rakes his dough in. They look ridiculous.

INT. WYNN CASINO - CRAP TABLE - DAWN

The damaged duo, Cliff and Wendy, are at the crap table. She's fidgety. He's betting big and can't stand straight.

CLIFF

This is how you overcome. You've gotta think oppos... posi... Posizit. Opposive... Positive! ...'N have the caution to throw winds in face of adversity!

WENDY

How much wind are you... How much...

CLIFF

I'm not gonna go over a couple' grand.

INT. WYNN CASINO - HOTEL ROOM - DAY

It's dark. The shades are drawn. In the shadows, we make out a body lying in the bed.

The door opens, ushering in the hard light of day. Cliff steps inside, closes the door and just stands there. We hear his heavy breathing in the dark.

After a time, the bedside lamp comes on. Wendy sits up, looks at the ruddy stubbled heaving mess that is Cliff. He looks like he's lost ten pounds. He starts pacing.

WENDY

How much did you lose?

CLIFF

'One point I was up. Way up.

WENDY

How much, Cliff?

Cliff squints, rubs his forehead. He sits on the bed.

CLIFF

...Twenty.

WENDY

Twenty?! I thought you said...

CLIFF

(standing, pacing)

Twenty! Twenty alright?! I know what I said. ...'Thought I'd win it back. And I would have too! If I'd had more to lose.

He sits on the bed again, still nursing his forehead.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

'Ever get the feeling something really bad's gonna... Get me some ice.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Two huge ICE CUBES fall into a glass sitting on a canary-yellow countertop. A copper fluid is splashed over them, and then soda water.

BOBBY BROOKS picks up the glass. Bobby's a cowboy, when he's not working at the gas station. He's wearing a mechanic's outfit with someone else's name on it. Big guy. Early 30's. Likable enough. He takes the first swig after a hard day and walks out of the room.

INT. REC ROOM - DAY

Bobby enters. Sliding glass-doors reveal funky fenceless backyard bordering wild field. A chained, oily German Shepherd is barking up a tired peach tree.

Bobby puts drink down, walks over to door taking off his jacket. Slides door open...

BOBBY BROOKS

Shu'p Skeeter!

The dog stops barking. Bobby closes door, throws jacket on couch and goes over to stereo system. He puts a cd in, goes back to his drink.

The music comes on -- Big and Rich - Comin' to Your City. Bobby swills his drink, reaches for a stetson on coat rack. He puts it on, walks over to a full length mirror in the middle of the room and starts to croon.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

...We're... comin' to yer citaaa...

INT. CLIFF'S JAG - MOVING - DAY

Cliff sits stiffly at the wheel. Wendy holds a cold compress against her forehead, weary eyes staring out at the endless flat desert in front of them. Cliff's cell rings. He pulls it out, looks at number. Ignores it.

WENDY

What are you gonna do now? You're not a producer anymore.

CLIFF

Shut up. Am too!

WENDY

Are not. If you'd paid more attention to my career...

CLIFF

Am too. What career?!

WENDY

That's what I mean. You didn't care.

CLIFF

Leave me alone. I just lost twenty grand. And I've got a headache.

She offers him the compress, which he holds to his head.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

I'll create another show. Better than Love and Money.

She takes this chance to make nice...

WENDY

I believe you could be just as lucky the first time.... I mean second time, as when you are first...

CLIFF

Wouldn't exactly call it luck. But that's right thinking, sure. I did it once. Only problem I've got is wondering what kind of show. I'll produce my own show with my own money. Well, I mean from the loan.

WENDY

Loan? What loan?

CLIFF

'Gonna borrow off the house.

WENDY

You mean 'on'.

CLIFF

Huh?

WENDY

What do you need a loan for? Take some of the money you have left and... What do you have saved... 200 grand minus the twenty, that's one eighty. Take some of that and... And whatever happened to that idea of making a low budget indie with me as the lead?!

CLIFF

Can't. Can't do it. Don't have it.

WENDY

What do you mean, you don't have it? What did you do with it?!

CLIFF

'Never had it. 'Lied.

WENDY

Bastard! ...How much do you have?

CLIFF

Left? ...'Bout a grand.

WENDY

A gr...! You son of a...!

She starts swinging wildly at him. He tries to protect himself with his free hand.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

As the Jag barrels across the countryside, we see a melon-sized boulder in the road which has fallen from a roadside wall of rock, and the driver-side tire is lining up with it.

CLIFF (V.O.)

Take it easy! Most of what I had went to buy you all the clothes and shoes you keep telling me you don't have anything to wear!

The tire, right on course for the boulder, 30 yards... 28... 26... 24... 22...

WENDY (V.O.)

I'm not the one who went out and bought a 30 thousand dollar watch!

INT. CLIFF'S JAG - MOVING - DAY

She swings at him, gets the back of his head, which causes him to lose control of the car and swerve ever-so-slightly.

CLIFF

That's an investment! It's my money!

WENDY

(kicking, scratching)

Not anymore!

He pins her against the passenger door to protect himself.

We see the boulder through the rear window, fading into the distance.

CLIFF

Lookit, you need to... Listen to me, you don't understand the way these things work. People do it all the time. There's nothing to it. It's called liquid. Liquid... dividends. And I'm not broke as long as I've got... material gains.

She stops swinging, listens. He lets go of her.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

...Yeah, see... this is what these people are looking for in making a loan. When you've got wealth, you've got to know these things.

She appears to be convinced. Primps in the visor mirror. Cliff seems convinced himself, pops a hotel chocolate.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Shouldn't be a problem, Mr. Treadwell. The standard eligibility requirements would apply, of course...

INT. CLIFF'S KITCHEN - DAY

Cliff walks around with the phone.

CLIFF

(into phone)

Eligibility being what do you mean?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(through phone)

Just a perfunctory check of your equity, assets, that sort of thing.

CLIFF

Yeah, well... No, I don't understand. I mean, it's my house.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

ELDIN MOTHERSBAUGH straightens with surprise at Cliff's confusion; the square, slightly graying man, 50's, sits on the corner of desk with phone.

MOTHERSBAUGH

(into phone)

Well, yes, it's your house, Mr. Treadwell, but you're asking the bank to lend you 200 thousand dollars. Before we did that, naturally we'd have to know that you have... well, at least that in assets.

INTERCUT

CLIFF

At least what?

Mothersbaugh sits at his desk, opens Cliff's file.

MOTHERSBAUGH

Two hundred thousand.

CLIFF

Then what do I need the loan for?!

EXT. CLIFF'S POOL - DAY

Wendy soaks in the hot tub. The kitchen window is open and she hears Cliff inside on the phone. She gets out, picks up her robe and goes into the house.

MOTHERSBAUGH (V.O.)

...Uh, Mr. Treadwell, I'm looking at your file right now and I see you're late on your payment.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Wendy enters, sees Cliff still on the phone straining not to interrupt the person on the other end.

CLIFF

Oh that. I meant to mail it in this morning. Usually my lawyer would...

Mothersbaugh sits back in his chair.

MOTHERSBAUGH

Mr. Treadwell, are you saying that you have no capitol and no other assets of any kind?

CLIFF

No, I'm not saying that.  
(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)

You're saying that! And... when you put it that way, it doesn't really... I mean... I've got worth. 'Got uh...

He looks for Wendy, who's already left the room.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Wendy sits at desk writing a letter. She has clothes laid out on the bed. We can hear Cliff on phone downstairs. She stops to listen.

CLIFF (O.S.)

No, I don't want you to send me any goddamn brochures!

She rolls her eyes and frowns, goes back to her letter.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Cliff is now trying to alter Mothersbaugh's growing suspicion of him with body English, stamping his foot, pumping his head in disappointment, clearly brand spanking new to all this fancy money talk.

CLIFF

Well, I never had to deal with... My lawyer usually would... Listen, I have friends, you know. Big ones. I could borrow it from any one of them. But I don't believe in that. Borrowing from friends.

Cliff hears a CAR APPROACHING.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(to Wendy)

Honey, there's somebody coming up. Would you see?

(into phone)

I'm sorry, what were you saying? ...No no no no no! I'm saying in good fai... on my track record.

Wendy appears in the hallway with coat on, carrying suitcase. She stands looking at a disheveled, desperate Cliff, a thin sheen of sweat and liquor vapor oozing out of him.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Look, don't condescend. I know it's a fricken bank! I'm saying are there people running the bank or is the bank running the bank?

(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)

You keep saying the bank this, the bank that, like it's telling you what to do! Tsch! 'Open the pod bay doors, Hal'.

One last nauseated look at him, then she goes to the door, opens it and walks out to a waiting cab.

Cliff senses something and leans to get a look into the foyer.

Wendy gets in the cab and closes the door.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Who is it, honey?

EXT. CLIFF'S MANSION - DAY

The cab pulls away. Soon Cliff appears, stands in the doorway watching the cab glide down the hill.

INT. MANSION - BEDROOM - DAY

Cliff enters, sees letter on the bed, picks up, reads it...

WENDY (V.O.)

I tried. Really hard. But it's no good, Cliff. There's too many things going wrong right now. I'm a positive person and I can't be around all this negativity. I can't deal with it. And plus I'm still not getting anywhere, and won't if I stay here. So I have to go. For my own sanity. I wish you the best of luck. Wendy. ...P.S. Sorry I tried to kill you.

Cliff sits on the bed. He covers his face with his hands.

CLIFF

Now?! Now?! Dammit!

INT. CLIFF'S LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Cliff stands staring at the phone like it's a bomb. Some days have past, judging by his 5 o'clock shadow and rumpled look. Looks like he's hold-up. He takes a few deep breaths, picks up phone and dials.

CLIFF

(into phone)

...Yes, Mr. Burnette please. Tell him Clifford Treadwell... I'm a friend, we've spoken.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A lavish suite of offices. A SECRETARY takes Cliff's call...



## SECRETARY

Hold please...

(switching lines)

Mr. Burnette, a Mr. Clifford Treadwell  
calling. He says...

INT. BURNETTE'S OFFICE - DAY

BOB BURNETTE, toned, dark-haired man in his early 40's listens  
on speaker.

BURNETTE

Yeah, I know who he is. I don't  
want the call, don't put him through.

He turns the speaker off.

INT. CLIFF'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cliff puts the phone down, a new strain of angst evident.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

A sidewalk cafe. Cliff finishes his lunch with friend FRANK  
RICHMAN, 30's, a well dressed man wearing a small fortune in  
gold.

RICHMAN

Cliff, I'd love to help you out, but  
all my money's tied up. I've got  
two deals pending and I'm making the  
final payment on my boat in two days.

A bleak smile is Cliff's response.

A MONTAGE

-- Cliff at a beach house talking to friends, a MARRIED COUPLE  
who both have that uncomfortable look.

-- Cliff at a riding stable talking to the OWNER who shakes  
his head "No".

-- Cliff at a book store sitting with the OWNER at a table  
in the rear. When Cliff stops talking and waits for his  
response, the man just laughs out loud.

-- Cliff driving 100 miles to Bakersfield... putting on his  
uniform to work in obscurity at... a Carl's Junior drive-  
thru window.

-- Cliff back at his mansion, boiling noodles. He looks  
outside and sees TWO MEN repossessing his Jag. He runs out  
and argues with them.

-- Cliff walking down the street toward a pawn shop when  
he's stopped by two SECURITY OFFICERS. Behind them is Alfred  
Nestor, the jeweler.

Nestor moves in and manually removes Cliff's watch. The three men move off down the street leaving a disarmed Cliff staring agog.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

Cliff strides reflectively down the boulevard, looking in all the shop windows at the things he used to be able to afford. He stares up the cold inhospitable street, speckled with happy people on their happy way to their happy futures. He looks desolate.

Just then, his CELL RINGS. And with nothing left to lose, he answers...

CLIFF

Hello. ...Oh. Yes, Mr. Mothersbaugh.  
...Four o'clock this afternoon?  
Uh... yea, sure. I'll see you then.

Cliff shuts his phone and heaves a hopeful sigh.

INT./EXT. BANK - DAY

The minute hand on the wall clock moves a notch, and it's four o'clock. Through the large front window we see Cliff, impeccably dressed, get out of a cab and enter the building. He walks across the bank to Mothersbaugh's door.

Through the open door we see Mothersbaugh get up and gesture for Cliff to enter. They shake hands and sit.

As Mothersbaugh explains the reason for the meeting, Cliff's body slowly sinks in the chair.

EXT. CLIFF'S MANSION - DAY

A steady stream of lookie-loo's and wanna-be's flow in and out of Cliff's house for his first-class garage sale. A SECURITY GUARD stands by the door.

A REALTOR hammers a huge 'For Sale' sign into the lawn.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Cliff, sits on the bed. A bottle of his new friend Jack on the night table. He's sodden. In tears. He gets up, picks up the bottle, trudges into the bathroom.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Cliff looks at himself in the mirror. He slams his fist into it. Oblivious to his cut hand, he walks out, disappears into the bedroom. Through the open door, we see a leather handbag sitting on the bed. After a time, Cliff reappears, picks up the bag and rips from it... a revolver. He runs his hands over it, bonding with it. Lays it on the bed.

CLIFF (V.O.)

I'd reached the end of my rope. And  
it didn't look like anyone was going  
to throw me anymore.

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - NIGHT

A cab pulls up to the entrance of the pier. Cliff gets out, pays the driver and heads toward the stairs along the boardwalk. He's so soused he's practically sober.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Cliff walks down the steps of the pier to the beach. He walks under the pier and stops by one of the supports. He's alone. He takes out the revolver.

EXT. BOARDWALK - NIGHT

KEVIN, a scruffy 9-year-old boy, lurches over the rail watching Cliff below. He motions to his friend BILLY, same age, and Billy runs over. The boys kneel and crane to get a look at Cliff.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Cliff slowly puts the gun barrel in his mouth. As he tries to pull the trigger, he hears WHISPERS. He looks up... sees no one, but pockets the gun anyway, walks under the pier and along the beach.

EXT. BOARDWALK - NIGHT

The boys, who have ducked out of sight, stretch slowly for another look at Cliff. When they see he's not there anymore, they get up and bolt down the stairs.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Cliff walks along the beach. In the background, the silhouettes of Billy and Kevin as they encroach.

Cliff turns, heads toward a facade of storefronts and vanishes. The boys hurry toward the buildings.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Cliff has stopped in the middle of a quiet alley. He looks up and down the alleyway, then pulls out the revolver. He puts the barrel to his mouth and again begins the torturous business of squeezing the trigger. Slowly the hammer rises... closer and closer to the point of no return.

Suddenly, we hear a COIN AS IT FALLS ON THE PAVEMENT. Cliff quickly turns to look over and sees two adolescent heads sticking out sideways into the alley from behind a bldg.

As Cliff takes the PISTOL out of his mouth, it GOES OFF. The BANG echoes as the bullet hits the wall. Cliff, in a kind of shock, turns to see the two heads pop out of site. Neighborhood DOGS are BARKING. Lights are coming on. Cliff falls against the wall, panting from adrenaline.

As he stands there trying to collect himself, the whole world stops for him. Something's happening to Cliff. A quiet whirlwind is taking root in him. His expression screams 'epiphany' like the flashing light of a slot machine on a winning pull. A very liberating thought is growing, insinuating itself upon him. His eyes go wider, his posture straightening now. People are starting to appear in their windows, but he scarcely notices. He's overwhelmed by his happy thoughts, like a crazy surfer eyeing a tidal wave...

CLIFF  
...Holy shit!!

He pockets the revolver and goes running out of the alley after the boys. More DOGS join in the BARKING.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Cliff comes out of the alleyway and sees the two boys, already half way back to the pier, flying like two black golfballs down a dark fairway.

CLIFF  
Wait! I wanna talk...! You just  
gave me... Don't run. I'm not mad.

But now the boys disappear into the dark forest holding up the pier. Cliff stops walking. He turns, looks out to sea, happily hurrying back to the expansive idea in his head.

Ecstatic, and now bolstered by the logic of his notion, he throws his glance heavenward and laughs at the stars.

He breaks into a proud, brisk stride toward the city as the DOGS, YOWLING hellhounds, send out their warnings after him.

EXT. BEN SMALLBERG'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cliff approaches on foot. BANG BANG BANGING on the door.

INT. SMALLBERG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben wakes from the pounding. He gets out of bed, pulls a 35. magnum out of his night table drawer, hurries over to the window for a look. He sees Cliff down on the patio in a giddy torpor, swaying and banging.

INT. SMALLBERG'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben comes down the stairs and goes to the entryway. He pockets the gun and opens the door. Cliff's beaming and glaring at him in one go.

Crazed fiery drunken eyes bent on get-back, come-back, and ruling the world.

CLIFF

"One"?! One, huh?! Bow down!

SMALLBERG

What are you doing, you crazy fuck?  
You've lost it.

CLIFF

By this time next week, I'm gonna  
have your job, you son-of-a-bitch...!

SMALLBERG

(taking out pistol)

I'll put a bullet in your fucking  
head, you don't get off my property!

A security patrol car approaches. When Cliff sees it, he jumps off the patio and disappears in the dark.

INT. GAS STATION - BATHROOM - DAWN

Cliff washes and towels himself dry. He puts his shirt back on, brushes his teeth with his finger.

EXT. STUDIO - DAY

Cliff approaches, stands outside the fence looking at the city-within-a-city. He walks over to the gate. The guard gives him a sympathetic look.

CLIFF

Hi. Just gonna get the rest of my  
stuff. Ten minutes.

Beat. The guard winks at him and nods.

INT. THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY - ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Money's office opens out to a lobby bordering the hallway. We see DOROTHY DODELL, Money's secretary, at her desk, signing for a package. The DELIVERY BOY gives her the receipt and walks off. She returns to her work.

Suddenly, SFIT SFIT SFIT SFIT SFIT... the copier in a tiny side room is going berserk. Dodell quizzes. She gets up and walks toward the copier room.

INT. COPIER ROOM - DAY

Dodell enters. Her eyes contort at the belching, paper-spitting Toshiba. As she moves toward it, the blur of Cliff whips past the open doorway behind her.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S INNER OFFICE - DAY

Art is sitting at his desk with his feet on the window pane looking out at the mountains. The closing door startles him and he turns to see Cliff, smiling, all goofy and beady-eyed.

MONEY

(rising)

How'd you get in here?

CLIFF

Don't freak out, I'm alright. 'Wanna borrow your ear for... one sentence. Five seconds.

MONEY

(sitting)

Jesus Christ, Clifford. You know I don't appreciate this kind of thing!

CLIFF

It's a show! Just like Star Search, or the other one! But...!

He leans over the desk for affect, hones in on Art...

CLIFF (CONT'D)

...The losers. The really bad ones.

(smiling)

...We torture them! As punishment!

It hangs there. Now Art bursts out laughing. And Cliff sits down like he's earned it.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

It's Survivor and Star Search, Idol... All of 'em, all in one!

Move to reveal the two men sitting at the desk with the Hollywood mountains between them. They sit quietly as Art actually considers it in a more serious vein. Finally he looks up at Cliff, and almost mystically...

MONEY

Yes!

Cliff slumps, damn near faints from fatigue and exhilaration. If we're really sharp, we might see that Art's 'yes', seems to have given Cliff his first case of heartburn in the bargain. But Cliff recoups pretty quickly with a belch, a real one, not like the 'belch' in the bar.

MONEY (CONT'D)

We'll have to get with standards and practices. The ratings board. Our lawyers will have to...

CLIFF

Uh... I didn't even think of going  
anywhere else with the it, Arty.  
But the idea is registered.

Art shadows his eyes at Cliff.

MONEY

Ok, let's have it. What do you want?

CLIFF

Executive producer.

MONEY

...Alright. But I get the option of  
assigning a producer to the show if  
things get hairy.

CLIFF

I want a definition of 'hairy' in  
the contract. I want Ben's office.  
And his damned purple goldfish too.

Art preps a cigar in silence. Then...

MONEY

...They're rumble fish, and the studio  
doesn't own them.

(lighting cigar)

...In the long run, it boils down to  
what's best for the studio. ...We'll  
put him in the north wing.

Cliff holds out his hand. Art shakes it heartily, and the  
ebbing tide begins to flow for Cliff...

INT. BOBBY'S REC ROOM - DAY

In his best cowboy duds, Bobby Brooks poses and croons to a  
tape of \_\_\_\_ in front of his new video camera.

Later...

Bobby runs the tape back and happily watches himself.

BOBBY BROOKS

Aw'll eat ma hat if that ain't just  
like McGraw! Just as good! Baron  
to Bullwinkle.

EXT./INT. STUDIO OFFICE - DAY

Cliff enters another office in the studio where Linda is now  
working. He tells her the good news and she springs to her  
feet, hugs and kisses him on the cheek. They run out.

## A MONTAGE

-- Cliff at the dealer with Linda, getting his car back.

-- Smallberg angrily overseeing TWO MEN as they move his things to the north wing.

-- Cliff in Mothersbaugh's office at the bank. The two men stand, smile, shake hands.

-- Linda with two others, a MAN and WOMAN, in a tv editing room, pouring over tapes of Survivor and similar shows -- wacky people eating spiders, worms, bugs and scorpions in their own juices because that's entertainment.

## INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Art's in with TWO EXECS., FOUR LAWYERS and THREE REPS OF STANDARDS AND PRACTICES, all of them going over documents and contracts.

Smallberg enters unannounced. And fuming.

MONEY

(to the others)

Gentlemen, would you excuse us for a moment.

The men rise and flow past Smallberg on their way out.

SMALLBERG

...What you said, about the north wing. 'Was bullshit! I knew it was bullshit when you started in. I don't know why I went along...

MONEY

What do you mean bullshit? Not bullshit.

SMALLBERG

I've gotta find out in the men's room, that he... he's moved into my office?!

MONEY

Now take it easy, Ben. You've got more square footage...

SMALLBERG

Don't patronize me!

MONEY

Look, he comes to me with an idea... 'take us right out of the slump we're in. Can't lose... He wanted the office, I put you in a bigger one. What was I supposed to do?



SMALLBERG

I don't know what you were supposed to do. But what you've done, is compelled my resignation.

MONEY

Ben...

SMALLBERG

As of this moment.

He turns and storms out. Art watches him go, then picks up the document he was studying and presses his intercom.

MONEY

(into intercom)

Dorothy, have them come back in.

A MONTAGE

-- Cliff at a massage parlor getting a steam and rub down. Lounging in a hot tub chewing a cigar. Doing a detox in a mud bath. Tanning on the roof.

-- Smallberg walking up the steps of a different studio, being ceremoniously greeted by a young MAN and WOMAN at the doors and escorted into the building.

-- Cliff standing outside his mansion looking proudly at it. He looks older, leaner. Hungrier. Reptilian somehow. Thicker skinned anyway. His smile has lost its suppleness.

-- Cliff pulls up to the studio gate. The guard salutes him and lets him through.

INT. TV EDITING ROOM - DAY

Cliff enters carrying briefcase, Linda and the other two she was with earlier are here. This is Cliff's pre-production crew. MANNY CASH and SYLVIA HOLLENSWORTH, both in their mid-twenties, are the new additions.

Cliff goes over to the table where they are and sets the briefcase down.

CLIFF

(opening briefcase)

Let's look at some tapes.

On the tv screen we watch a series of shows, a few from Sweden, but mostly Japanese. This is actual FILE FOOTAGE of shows that exist today. Cliff describes what we're seeing...

...A beachside wrestling match which pits hulking pros against 90-lb. weaklings.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

The losers here are tossed out of the ring onto one of the two platforms. One platform's a glue trap. The other one's charged with electricity.

We watch a tossed loser land and get zapped like a bug.

...'Super Jockey' -- Contestants immerse themselves in steaming water.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

The water's scalding hot. These people are lowering themselves into it in exchange for commercial time to advertise their wares. How's that for a tough sell?

...Ultra Quiz -- contestants spar with masked pro-wrestlers on a floating ring in the ocean.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Each round ends when the pro tosses the contestant into the water where chum is then thrown to attract the nearby shark.

We see a tossed contestant flapping around furiously in the water to get away from a shark.

Cliff turns the tv off. His staff is sort of frozen by what they've just watched.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

This is what we want. No more eating worms, bugs and twigs. And to hell with banishing them. We're gonna torture 'em. Not in close proximity to threshold! ...But we're gonna. Statistics show that this is where we want to go. The country, not everyone, but droves. So what can I tell you, we're blessed. We don't match the competition, or try to beat it. We pulverize it. We set the trend. Stay on the cut. And we don't make mistakes. 'Cause they're always gaining. ...'Wanna see people stressed out. Major. They need to be stressed out so that the people watching can relax. Got it?

Beat. All three nod.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Alright, let's go to work.

Manny and Sylvia get up and exit. Linda remains seated at the table as Cliff puts the videos in his briefcase.

They both seem to want to say something to each other. Something against the grain. But they won't.

LINDA

What... Where did... How did you come up with the idea, Cliff?

He stops what he's doing. Goes back in his mind.

CLIFF

...I'd had it. I tried to off myself. With a pistol, in an alley. As I was pulling the trigger, I heard a noise and I turned. ...Two kids, probably 9 or 10, were hiding behind a building, staring at me.

(turning to her)

They were probably too scared to try to do anything to stop me. But they can't look away...

LINDA

Don't you think you could have...

She begins to tear.

CLIFF

Could have what?

LINDA

Told... Let me know?

CLIFF

...Listen, Linda, don't feel bad. I didn't tell anybody. I lost my car, my girl, my house. Talking wasn't exactly what came to mind. ...Tsch! Those kids were fascinated...

LINDA

Why did she leave?

CLIFF

...Wendy? Just got fed up with my bullshit.

LINDA

Seems ironic to me that she got upset with your bullshit, but somehow she missed that you might contemplate suicide.

CLIFF

Oh no, she's a good... I put her through a lot. She's... You just have to get to know her.

LINDA

Yeah, and give her whatever she wants.

He's caught off guard.

CLIFF

...What do you mean? She's just the kind of girl who likes nice things.

LINDA

I like nice things. All girls like nice things. I just don't look at them like they're a requirement for friendship. Or a relationship.

He's speechless at a brazenness he's never seen in her. She gets up. Shaking. Collects her things.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Do me a favor. We're starting a new show together. If you have any idea that you'd like to 'off yourself' again, please let me know so I can cover for ya. Hell, I may even be able to talk you out of it and save myself the hassle.

She walks out. He stands, staring into the space she left.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - DAY

Two SET BUILDERS prepare grout, paint. Manny is making his way to the booth and overhears their conversation.

1ST BUILDER

...'Cause somebody could get killed on a show like this.

MANNY

No. It's very controlled. It's about people's limits, you see? If they can't take it...

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Arty chides a timid PRODUCT SPONSOR.

MONEY

...all they have to do is say "Stop". It's all in the contract. Read it before you start in on your drivel, ok? ...We're gonna make a killing on this show, are you kidding me?!

INT. HALLWAY - BILLING DEPT - NEXT MORNING

The set builder who made the 'someone could get killed' comment clutches, looks angrily at pink slip and final check.

INT. BOBBY'S REC ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby's having a party. Plenty of the LOCALS, probably from the 'Yahoo' bar where he probably hangs out. They're watching Bobby's singing video. Bobby's girlfriend, buxom bottle-blond LONA LOGANBERRY beams with pride in him.

Some of the people mouth the words along with Bobby. When the video ends, the gang applauds. Bobby smiles, taking in the compliments. Lona shines with her Bobby.

EXT. BOBBY'S HOUSE - DAY

Bobby checks his mailbox. To his happy surprise the envelope he's been waiting for has arrived. He opens it immediately.

Disappointment swipes the smile off his face. He tears up the letter and goes into the house.

LONA (V.O.)

Don't worry, baby. There's plenty others. Better 'n them. You're gonna be a star, darlin. Gonna go right to the top.

INT. BOBBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lona lies next to Bobby in bed. She curls a lock of his hair with her finger as she consoles him. He can use it.

LONA

And you know what, baby? Even if you don't, I'm still gonna love ya just as....

He springs up and gets out of bed.

BOBBY BROOKS

Don't tawk like 'at. Awm goin'. Just lack you said. Aw'm gowna be a stawr. It's ma destiny.

LONA

I know, honey.

BOBBY BROOKS

Then don't tawk like 'at!

He walks out, grabbing his stetson on the way.

CLIFF (V.O.)

Guess what. I've got a name! I'll tell you when I get there.

INT. OFFICE BLDG. - 1ST FLOOR LOBBY - DAY

Cliff enters the new 9 story Culver City building. A large round counter in the center of the lobby houses security monitors of the stairwells and hallways. The monitors are continuously observed by a GUARD. Cliff nods to him and approaches the elevators.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Cliff enters the large production office for his new show. Separate offices debouch from the large main room but much of the floor is open and some 25-30 PEOPLE sit at desks. Lots of them were on For Love and Money. Cliff nods and says hello to everyone as he passes through on his way to Linda's separate office down the hall.

INT. LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Linda's typing an e-mail when Cliff enters.

CLIFF

Morning. Can I come in?

LINDA

You better. So tell me! What's the name of the show?

Cliff comes in, shuts the door.

CLIFF

Uh... I wanna say something first.  
(sitting)

I was thinking about what you said the other day, and maybe I should have... I mean even though the show was finished, we worked together for quite a while and I should have talked to you about it before I went off and... Tsch!

She wipes a tear from her eye, smiling.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Anyway... Ok, ready?! ...The name of the show is... Extreme Audition!

LINDA

That's... perfect!

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Art has the tv on in his office. Cliff, and a SPONSOR in his early 20's, are with him.

MONEY

Perfect. It's a perfect title.  
(MORE)

MONEY (CONT'D)

It'll be on everything by the end of the week. Oh! Shsh shsh. Here it is...

Art turns the tv sound up and they watch...

Tv screen where the 4 o'clock news is on and the newscaster begins his report.

NEWS CASTER

There is growing concern among members of Amnesty International over a television talent show that is currently in pre-production. The show, entitled 'Extreme Audition', will feature contestants who'll audition for a panel of experts and their performances will also be voted on by a television audience, like 'American Idol' and other shows are. The difference is that the losers on 'Extreme Audition' will be tortured.

Against his best effort, the news caster laughs.

NEWS CASTER (CONT'D)

That's what it says here, folks... Amnesty International attorney, Deborah Dooley, called the premise of the show 'demented' and said that the studios, in stooping to the lowest common denominator for ratings, are demeaning the very industry they represent.

Art turns the sound down. He's smiling ear-to-ear. The sponsor too.

CLIFF

I don't think Debbie Dooley will be a contestant.

MONEY

Bhaa ha ha ha!! No, but she does us a great service, going on like that. It's not every day you get great publicity like that in pre-production.

SPONSOR

She does seem to protest too much, doesn't she?

MONEY

She must have seen the projections.

They bust out laughing.

INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT

The place bristles with set builders, painters, electricians. We see the early shell of the Extreme sound stage. Cliff stands with set designer, NAT HAYES, and an ASSISTANT, going over a color palate for the wall.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Bobby seals his video in an envelope, hands it to lady at counter. She stamps it and tosses it into a box.

INT. STUDIO AUDITIONING ROOM - DAY

A large hall on the ground floor, used mainly for props, has been cleared out and the auditions for Extreme are underway. There are some sixty hopefuls being instructed by LAURA BELL, the talent coordinator. Outside there are hundreds more.

Move to reveal Cliff up in the stands, watching in obscurity.

INT. STUDIO MAILROOM - DAY

Hundreds upon hundreds of video's, wrapped just like Bobby's, flood into the place from U.S. mail, DHL, Fed-Ex and UPS trucks. FIVE STUDIO EMPLOYEES sort them.

INT. CLIFF'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cliff and Linda are watching audition videos from a huge stack. A half-eaten pizza sits on the table with a few empty beer bottles. The two of them look exhausted, but they're enjoying the tapes. They laugh at the same things.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

A 99 seat playhouse in the valley. There's a small acting class going on. A 6'8" man is on the stage doing a monologue from Hamlet. With a lisp.

ACTOR

To be or not to be. That ith the  
quethton. Whether it ith nobler in  
the mind to thuffer the thlingth and  
arrowth of outrageouth fortune...

Sitting in the back row with a girlfriend, Wendy rolls her eyes at the man's performance. SALLY, her girlfriend, reads Variety. She turns to Wendy.

SALLY

Hey, I thought you said your ex was  
a loser.

WENDY

So?



SALLY

Says right here he's producing a new show.

WENDY

(taking paper)

Lemme see that.

She reads.

ACTOR

Thuth conscienth doth make cowardth  
of uth all. And thuth the native  
hue of retholution ith thicklied  
o'er with the pale catht of thought.  
And enterpritheth of great pith and  
moment, with thith regard their  
currenth turn awry, and looth the  
name of action. Thoft you now! The  
fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orithonth  
be all thy thinth remembered.

INT. WENDY'S HONDA CIVIC - NIGHT

Wendy sits in her car outside the theater. Slowly, she takes out her cellphone.

INT. CLIFF'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Linda arranges the next group of tapes to be viewed. Cliff enters from the kitchen with two huge mugs of joe.

CLIFF

Never fear, coffee's here.

LINDA

Oh good!

(taking mug)

Well the next ones are dancers, so  
maybe it won't be so...

CLIFF

Oh, it will, trust me.

They laugh.

LINDA

We're terrible.

CLIFF

We most certainly are. No, we are.

Their laughter fizzles when the PHONE RINGS.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

He picks it up.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Hello.

Cliff stands motionless as he listens to the caller. He walks over to a chair by the hall and sits. His demeanor changes as he listens.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 Yes. ...Yes. ...Yes. ...Bye.

He gets up, walks over and puts the phone down. Linda sees the change in him.

LINDA  
 You look like they canceled Love And Money again.

He comes out of it.

CLIFF  
 Oh, no it's nothing. I'm just tired.  
 Sorry, could we finish this tomorrow?

Beat. She gets up, a little put off.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry, I just... I've gotta get some sleep.

She gets her coat. They walk out to her car.

EXT. CLIFF'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

The blinds are thrown open. And in the window, Wendy looks out stretching like a cat after a good nap. We see Cliff in the background heading for the shower. See the reflection on the window of a near cloudless blue sky as the day begins.

INT. TV STUDIO - DAY

Pride in full plume, Cliff walks the new set with staff.

One side of the huge stage is awash with bright almost cartoon colors, with a clear sky and green hills like The Sound of Music for a backdrop.

The other side is a dungeon set, with showy whips, floggers and chains. An inquisition chair. We see other implements of torture being wheeled in from offstage.

INT. LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Linda, Manny and Sylvia make the final selections of contestant videos. We see Bobby's video with his name on it in the approved pile.

EXT. BOBBY'S HOUSE - DAY

Bobby goes to his mail box and opens it. Bills and fliers. He takes it all out and goes into the house.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

As Bobby enters, the PHONE RINGS. He picks it up and his life changes...

BOBBY BROOKS

(into phone)

Hello... Yes. ...Aw did?! ...Aw am?! Well hoppin' jalepenos! Yeehaaww!!! Yesireee, Bob!! Oh ma girl is gowna be so happy. 'Course she allus said she knew Aw'd make...  
...Yes. Yes, yes...  
(grabbing pen and pad)  
...lemme rat that down. Yes, yes...

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Bobby and Lona get out of a cab, take out their luggage and go through the doors of the terminal.

INT. STUDIO AUDITIONING ROOM - DAY

The room is filled with people approved for call backs. Cliff, Linda, Manny and Sylvia sit with Laura Bell as they watch...

...A beautiful, talented SINGER belting it out. ...A tragic MAN on all fours doing dog impressions. ...A MAN who starts tap dancing and segues into ballet. ...An ACTOR who strains so hard that when he walks 'upstage' the sole of one of his shoes comes off. ...A WOMAN who plays Chopsticks on a piano between doing jokes as a stand-up. ...A man who simply freezes on stage in terror. ...An IMPRESSIONIST who puts on different hats and does the same impression.

...A man... hard to tell what he is; little karate, little singing, some obscene body gestures and he ends it off with what look like signals a football referee would make.

...Bobby now stands before Laura at the table with THREE other JUDGES.

LAURA

Whenever you're ready, Mr. Brooks.

After a beat, Bobby begins his song. He's so nervous it's not coming out the way he wanted, but he pushes on.

Laura starts a quiet conversation with another judge.

Move to reveal the crowd of contestants, nervous about their own auditions, paying no attention to Bobby.

Bobby's keenly aware of the sounds of inattentiveness, and it makes him nervous.

The song comes to an end. Laura turns her attention to Bobby.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Thank you very much, Mr...  
(looking at his video  
cassette)  
Mr. Brooks. You'll be notified in  
two days of the results.

Bobby hangs his head sadly.

BOBBY BROOKS  
...Thaink ye.

He walks off with hat in hand like a man leaving church.

INT. STUDIO - EXTREME SOUND STAGE - DAY

Cliff jokes with a few WELL KNOWN TV AND MOVIE PERSONALITIES.  
They're being courted for the show.

INT. CLIFF'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cliff is sprawled on the couch with a beer. He's exhausted.  
Wendy enters from the kitchen with a piece of his favorite  
cake. She gives it to him, kissing him cutie-style.

WENDY  
Sugar, have you decided on the hosts  
yet?

CLIFF  
No, honey, I've still got a couple  
to see.

Wendy slinks along the couch provocatively.

WENDY  
Well, you know, I was thinking, it  
would be a great idea to have like...  
an unknown on the panel...

LINDA (V.O.)  
You have got to be kidding!

INT. LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Linda paces angrily. Cliff sits on her desk.

CLIFF  
It makes sense, though. You know,  
bring the audience in more.

LINDA

Yeah and it's not like she has no experience. She did do an equity-waver one act about a year ago. ...I didn't know she was back. Was the ink on the contract even dry?

CLIFF

Ok, so you don't think much of her. But once you get to know her...

LINDA

Like you do, huh? Was it her that called that night? When you put the phone down 'looked like you had buckshot in the hams?

CLIFF

Ha...?! ...Look, Linda, I don't think you're being fair.

LINDA

Fair?! What's fair about letting a gold digger manipulate you when I'm in love with you?!

Cliff freezes, flush.

LINDA (CONT'D)

There, I said it. I'm sorry, Cliff. You didn't leave me much wiggle room.

CLIFF

I... I have to... Gotta meet...

LINDA

Erin, I know.  
(handing him files)  
Give him these. Tell him I'll call him tonight.

He takes the files, nods 'yes' and quickly exits.

INT. CLIFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cliff sits at a table acting like he's using his blackberry, but he's really secretly watching a livid Wendy pace.

WENDY

Who the hell does she think she is?!

CLIFF

Honey, she's co-producing!

WENDY

She was a fucking assistant on the last show! All of a sudden she's an authority?

Cliff is silent. Wendy keeps pacing.

WENDY (CONT'D)

It's funny, you know. I always had this sneaking suspicion she was trying to sabotage you on Love and Money.

CLIFF

Sabotage?

WENDY

I never liked her. Something about her, I don't know what.

Cliff's lost. Trying to find words. Any words. None coming.

WENDY (CONT'D)

'Ask me, you should fire her ass!

CLIFF

Oh come on! I can't fire her!

Wendy stops pacing, turns to him, accentuating the beautiful gifts he loves so much.

WENDY

Well... I understand. It's your show, and you do know best. But, honey, who are you gonna trust on this one thing? Me or her?

CLIFF

...I'll talk to the others. See what they have to say.

She goes to him, lovey again.

WENDY

Talk to Arty. Arty loves me.

CUT TO

AN OPEN BOOK which fills the entire screen.

As the pages are turned, we see a history of human torture in pictures. -- Gruesome drawings of brutal punishment through the Middle Ages... Denailings. A red ant cage placed over the chest of a man tied to the ground. A man with hands and feet bound, sitting suspended atop the fine point of a steeple. -- Photographs of some of the unspeakable war crimes of our time. -- All in all, a comprehensive rendering of drawings and snap shots of torture for punishment, torture for revenge, torture for redemption, and torture for pleasure... -- A Dominatrix.

Move to reveal that we're in...

INT. CLIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Cliff, flipping through the pages of the book as JENNIFER HODGES, his new secretary, 20's, appears in his doorway.

JENNIFER

She's here.

CLIFF

Oh good. Send her in.

Jennifer exits. Cliff closes the book and places it on his desk.

Jennifer returns with MISTRESS RHEA, a tall shapely woman with smooth pale white skin and jet black hair which matches her lipstick and nail polish. Her business suit looks both improbable and uncomfortable. Cliff rises.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - DAY

A SET CREW is testing and putting the final touches on props for the show... a stretching machine... a dunking machine... pillories... neck screws... an electric chair.

EXT. BOBBY'S BACK YARD - DAY

Bobby shovels dogshit into a trash bin. Skeeter gnaws a ham bone on the patio.

Lona slides the door open and hollers...

LONA

Honey, they just called! You're in!  
You're gonna be on the show!

BOBBY BROOKS

Yeeeeeehaaaw yip yip yip!!!

He runs into the house.

INT. LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Linda and Cliff sit across from each other at her desk.

CLIFF

Arty seemed to think it was a good...

LINDA

(rolling her eyes)  
Oh gawwwd! Ok. That's fine.

CLIFF

Don't.

LINDA

What? What do you want me to say?

CLIFF

Look, I thought I was being pretty democratic, ok?

LINDA

Ok, well you get the democratic award.

CLIFF

We took a vote and including your vote, it was decided that she'd make a... nice addition.

He looks secretly at her.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

And, Linda, since we're at it, I think it'd be a good idea to get another thing out of the way.

She looks him in the eye. Knows what's coming.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

To tell you the truth I... I never knew you had those kind of feelings for me. And uh... I'm flattered. ...But I'm... well obviously I'm seeing someone. ...Yes we had a break up... lasted like a month or whatever... but we've been together for almost 17 months now and... well, that's all I want to say. And I just don't want it to get in the way of... our friendship, or the show.

She shuts her eyes and nods 'alright'. Cliff gets up.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Gotta go.

LINDA

Yeah.

CLIFF

You alright?

She glares at him. He turns and exits.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - DAY

It's the day of the first show. Just a few hours left before the countdown. Cast and crew rushing around frantically. The DIRECTOR is glaring impatiently up into the control booth waiting for a sound cue. The contestants are being herded back toward their dressing rooms.

Mistress Rhea, properly dressed as a Dominatrix, chats with a DICK CHENEY LOOK-ALIKE over coffee.



Wendy talks with the other two panelists -- KATHY GRIFFIN and DAVID ALLEN GRIER.

The most important cluster of all, and probably a big part of the reason everyone's on their toes and hurrying about so; Money and BARRY HOLLENBECK, Hitchcockian parent company C.E.O., conferring with Cliff and Linda.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

A crescent moon smiles amid fat flickering diamond stars.

The view moves down toward the earth and we see a huge satellite dish perched like a venus fly trap in the rear of a pizza parlor. Beyond the parlor are rows of identical houses forming straight lines into infinity.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

A crowded teen hang out. Families enjoying the food here too. A zillion tv sets hanging from the ceiling. Above the rabble, we first hear a single voice...

MALE VOICE

Peter, switch it! 18. Come on!

Then a group joins in...

TEENS

Yeah, Pete. Extreme extreme extreme!

PETE, 30's, head dough-tosser, grabs a generic remote and starts firing at various sets in the house.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

Emanating from the endless flat facade of identical houses, discordant flashes of television light begin to conform as people tune in to check out Extreme Audition.

FADE TO BLACK

Silence. Then suddenly, a DRUM ROLL is heard over...

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we welcome you to a show the likes of which you have never seen. Sit back and relax now. You're about to experience the first episode of... Extreme Audition!!

FADE UP ON

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

APPLAUSE as all at once, the stage lights come up, and we see the two-sided set of Extreme.

The THEME MUSIC cues, a catchy pop tune haunted by a familiar 15th century dirge, and a huge billowing white cloud is lowered down from above carrying the panelists, Kathy, David and Wendy.

GARY GRIMSBY, 20ish dapper host, walks onto the stage beaming a winning smile at the studio audience as the panelists settle on a raised section behind him.

GRIMSBY

Good evening! My name is Gary Grimsby. To my left, our panel of judges... David Allen Grier... Kathy Griffin... and Wendy Wainwright. Good evening, panel.

PANEL

Hi!

KATHY

Ah ah ah ah! I'm sorry, Gary, that intro gets a 5.

Laughter.

DAVID

That's awfully generous.

GRIMSBY

Oh my!

KATHY

I say fling him off the lot.

DAVID

Wait a while. It's almost rush hour.

GRIMSBY

Shouldn't I explain the rules of the show first?

DAVID

Oh, alright.

GRIMSBY

(to audience)

We'll hear more from our panel later.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

A captive audience watches Grimsby walk across the tv stage explaining the rules of the show...

GRIMSBY

Each episode, 12 contestants will vie for 1 of 5 exclusive entertainment contracts awarded at the end of the

(MORE)

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
season. The winners will enjoy a  
year long national tour performing  
for live audiences in the capitols  
of 15 states across the country.

Grimsby arrives at the dark side of the stage.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
The losers...

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Grimsby looks around the dungeon.

GRIMSBY  
Well, the losers will be subjected  
to a gradient scale of rude awakening.  
Contestants will be graded from one  
to ten, ten being the worst. Anyone  
with a score lower than three, will  
be exposed to everything from insult  
to injury, depending on their score.  
Here to help us with the more extreme  
aspects of the show... Mistress Rhea!

Mistress Rhea enters through the dungeon door dressed in  
tight black leather, cracking a whip with great skill.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
...And straight from a relaxing  
vacation at Abu-Ghraib, "Rick" Cheney,  
ladies and gentlemen!

The Cheney look-alike enters carrying a sign that reads  
'Executive' on one side and 'Legislative' on the other.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
How's your heart, sir?

CHENEY  
Wanna go to jail today, son?

GRIMSBY  
No, sir, I sure don't.

CHENEY  
Then quit the small talk and let's  
get on with the show.

GRIMSBY  
Good idea!

Cheney and Rhea sit upon their thrones as Grimsby returns to  
center stage.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Our first contestant is a young man from Portland, Oregon. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to Marty Leonard.

MARTY LEONARD enters to hearty applause. Slight, in his 20's, Marty treads with trepidation to center stage with a copy of War and Peace. Grimsby shakes his hand.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Welcome to the show, Marty.

MARTY

Thank you.

GRIMSBY

Tell us a bit about yourself.

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - NIGHT

Cliff and Linda stand anxiously watching the show behind TECHNICIANS at their boards. The director sits on a stool with headphones instructing cameramen on the stage.

DIRECTOR

Right, that's good. Ok pull up a little... Go to two.

MARTY (O.S.)

I was born and raised in Portland.  
I work at Walmart as a...

DIRECTOR

Alright, pan the audience on four...

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Marty finishes telling us about his job and Grimsby asks...

GRIMSBY

So, Marty, what have you come to show us this evening?

Marty holds up the book.

MARTY

I'm going to speed-talk from War and Peace.

GRIMSBY

Ok, but don't take all day.  
(indicating audience)  
It's all yours.

Grimsby walks off the stage. Marty opens the book, turns toward the audience and begins an impossibly rapid recitation of Anna Pavlovna Scherer's words...

MARTY

"Well, Prince, so Genoa and Lucca are now just family estates of the Buonapartes. But I warn you, if you don't tell me that this means war, if you still try to defend the infamies and horrors perpetrated by that Antichrist- I really believe he is Antichrist- I will have nothing more to do with you and you are no longer my friend, no longer my 'faithful slave,' as you call yourself! But how do you do? I see I have frightened you- sit down and tell me all the news."

The audience applauds, and Grimsby reappears.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

The patrons, a group now, voice their opinions of Marty.

1ST MAN

He was good.

1ST WOMAN

Yeah, he's fast.

2ND MAN

They won't get him.

On a tv set we see the judges scores coming up now...

GRIMSBY

(on tv screen)

Two... Two... One! Five, divided by three... Looks like you're ok, Marty.

The audience applauds. Grimsby pats Marty on the back.

INT. SMALLBERG'S NEW OFFICE - NIGHT

Smallberg sits in his new office at a new studio with RANDY WEIR, another exec in his 40's. They're watching Extreme on a cabinet set.

RANDY

Well, they went all out. 'Production values are good, if nothing else.

SMALLBERG

Fucking medieval. ...Only takes one fuck up on a show like that.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

A new contestant stands with Grimsby. GORAN 'BEAN' MENZIES is a long lanky buck-toothed eager-beaver out of Burbank.

He's inadvertently comical in his baby-puke green tights and happy-face t-shirt.

GRIMSBY

Ok, Bean, what have you come to show us tonight?

BEAN

I'm gonna river dance.

GRIMSBY

You are, are ya? Alright. Ladies and gentlemen, Bean!

The audience applauds as Bean plods to the sunny side of the stage. A SCOTTISH DITTY starts up and Bean starts leaping in the air with all the grace of a kangaroo in a phone booth.

For a few brief seconds the audience is silent, dead still as Bean makes his gangly bid. Then the chuckling begins.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

But here, everyone's in stitches as Bean's ribald rendition of the river dance comes over the air.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

As Bean bumbles through his number, David rings a bell on his desk. A WOMAN appears immediately from backstage, rolling out a gong. David and Kathy pull out rubber hammers and hit the GONG. The music stops, and shortly after, Bean too.

GRIMSBY

Oh oh! That can mean only one thing. The judges have decided that... well... you suck! When the gong is sounded, it means an automatic score of 6. That means you've earned yourself the unfortunate consequence of a penalty session in the dungeon.

Music; a CLOWNISH MARCH starts up.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Oh! Whoop! What's that sound? Oh yes! It's our friend, Lelioblokem!

LELIOBLOKEM prances onto the stage. He looks enough like Simon Cowell to make us laugh but not enough for a law suit. He's wearing white tights, frilly shirt and flings a scarf he wears over his shoulder as he canters up to Bean. In a whining stringy voice he chastises...

LELIOBLOKEM

(English accent)

I've never seen anything as horrific.

(MORE)

LELIOBLOKEM (CONT'D)

Were you kidding? Having us all on?  
It was animal like in its awkwardness.  
A mentally-challenged emu you were.  
(laughter)  
You're mother should be totally  
ashamed of you. You're a disgrace.

GRIMSBY

Thank you, Lelio. Thank you.

Lelioblokem parades offstage. Grimsby turns to us...

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Now to the penalty phase.

The audience buzzes with anticipation.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

(indicating to Bean)

This way.

He leads Bean over to the dungeon. Cheney and Mistress Rhea  
step up to a tripod with a rotating disk.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

It's comeuppance time. Our experts  
will bid for the contract by throwing  
a ball onto the discipline disk.  
The one whose ball lands on the  
highest number will exact the penalty.  
And for those of you who've been  
living in a cave for the last two  
weeks, each contestant may halt the  
execution of their penalty, or  
punishment, by simply telling the  
punisher to... 'stop'.  
(to punishers)  
Please make your tosses now.

Cheney and the Mistress toss their balls onto the disk.  
Cheney gets an 8, Mistress Rhea a 5.

INT. EXTREME CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Cliff, chewing his nails, zeros in on the action.

GRIMSBY (O.S.)

Bean, looks like you're with Cheney.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Bean's not quite over the fact that they didn't like his  
dance. Cheney points at him, grimacing. Now he points to a  
section of the dungeon and Bean makes his way there.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

Silence. People lean forward, some rock as they watch Bean take off his shirt in compliance with Cheney's orders.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Cheney ties Bean's wrists to the wall above his head. Now he picks up a long metal cone with four towels tied to the end of it on a disk. Cheney dunks the towels in a bucket of water until they're soaked. He flips a switch on the cone and the towels start whipping around rapidly.

Cheney moves toward Bean. He holds the cone so that the whirling towels flick at Bean's back.

BEAN

Aaaaahhhhhh!! Aaaaahhh!!

The audience is silent, not sure what to think. But few take their eyes off Bean as he squirms and hollers...

BEAN (CONT'D)

Aaaaahhhh! Aaaahhhhh!!

Move to reveal Cliff up in the booth, looking apprehensively down at the audience for reaction.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

The crowd starts commenting as they slowly acclimatize to Bean screaming on the set.

1ST WOMAN

Oh that is sooo gross!

1ST MAN

That ain't nothin'.

2ND MAN

Yeah, I'd like to see you up there.

1ST MAN

I'd do it. But they'd never get me. I can dance better than that. He deserves to get thwacked.

Laughter.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Cheney hauls the whirling whip-towels off Bean's back and shuts off the cone. Bean's back is red and welted. He moans as Cheney unties him. Grimsby hands Bean his shirt.

GRIMSBY

You alright?



BEAN

...I guess.

GRIMSBY

Geez, I'm sorry it had to end this way. But you did take your punishment without asking Cheney to stop, so you'll collect your winnings. Thanks for coming on the show.

Grimsby gestures where Bean should exit.

Bean looks at him, then out at the audience. And in the cold empty silence, he wanders off the stage.

Move to reveal Cliff, who's stopped breathing to listen for reaction. The MUSIC cues up. And finally, the CROWD ROARS. Cliff sighs with relief, smiles cautiously as Grimsby trots back to center stage.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Lona's waitressing. Extreme is on two sets over the bar. She puts her tray down and goes over to the bar phone.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Of course, Bobby's sitting there glued to the set. On it, the third contestant, an EAST INDIAN WOMAN in her 30's, is center stage with Grimsby. Bobby grabs the PHONE on the first RING.

BOBBY BROOKS

Yeah.

INTERCUT

LONA

Honey, are you watchin'?

BOBBY BROOKS

Ha ha ha! Yeah.

LONA

I don't know if I like it very much.

BOBBY BROOKS

Well that's the way it is these days.

LONA

Couldn't you get on another show?

BOBBY BROOKS

No! 'Hard enough gettin own this un. 'Sides that fella's a clown. They signed me up 'cause Aw've got talent.

LONA  
I hope so, baby.

BOBBY BROOKS  
Don't hope so. Know so! Aw know  
so! Ok, honey, next un's comin'  
own. Ba.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

The third contestant, a beautiful brown-skinned woman does a sultry belly dance to a RAGA. David and Kathy dance along in their chairs. When the woman finishes her dance, the audience applauds. David gets out of his chair and dances to get the woman's attention as Grimsby appears.

DAVID  
I'll need your phone number. What's  
your sign?

Laughter. The woman smiles shyly.

GRIMSBY  
That was wonderful. How long have  
you been dancing?

INDIAN WOMAN  
All my life really. I started when  
I was three.

In the APPLAUSE, we move to reveal Cliff in the booth, smiling ear-to-ear.

GRIMSBY  
You certainly have talent. Judges?

The judges punch in their scores. All ones. The audience applauds.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
My goodness! A perfect score! We'll  
be seeing more of you in the future,  
I'm happy to say. Thank you.

The lady scampers happily off the stage.

Move to reveal Linda watching Cliff; seeing the happiness and pride he has in this moment; still falling for him.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
(to audience)  
We'll be back with a juggler, a mime,  
an actor, and a songstress that bares  
an uncanny resemblance to Paris  
Hilton! Don't go away.

INT. EXTREME CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Arty's up in the booth with Cliff and Linda. In the standard commotion as the screens go blank for commercial feed, Arty turns to the two of them.

MONEY

You make a fine team. I'll reserve my judgment until it's aired. But with what I've seen here so far tonight, I'm pleased.

CLIFF

Thank you, Arty.

LINDA

Thanks, Arty.

MONEY

(indicating stage)

You better get down there.

Cliff and Linda hurry out and down toward the stage.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

As Cliff and Linda arrive, they're joined by Manny and Sylvia. After a brief huddle, Cliff walks over to director and SHOWRUNNER, Linda and others disperse to different areas of stage. Linda goes over to judges.

LINDA

It's going really well, guys. David, that stuff, with the dancing, it's great. Kathy, I liked the tete-a-tete with Grimsby. I think let's have that develop a little.

KATHY

No problem. Can I have my own whip?

They laugh. Linda leans in to Wendy.

LINDA

Wendy, it's fine. But we want to see you participate a little more.

WENDY

I know, I was...

LINDA

You're just getting comfortable, it's ok. You're doing fine, just speak your mind a little more, that's all. You look lovely.

WENDY

Thank you.

LINDA

Alright, we're moving up on 30  
seconds, folks. Anything else?

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

A GP applies ointment to Bean's welts. The single soul who's not excited about the show, is more insulted than in pain.

DOCTOR

You'll be fine. Tomorrow you won't  
even feel it. 'Nice little paycheck.

Bean's silent.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

The cameras are rolling again. An honest MIME enchants with silent storytelling.

Close on the judges scoring displays -- one, one, two.

...A JUGGLER is on the stage. Eight balls in the air and he's doing a little dance step. The audience is with him.

Judges -- one, one, one. Grimsby moves to center stage in the roaring applause.

GRIMSBY

Wasn't he something? Our next  
contestant hails from Phoenix, Arizona  
and I think she looks just like  
Paris... David, did you see...?

DAVID

Yes, I saw her. Only difference is  
she's a real blonde. And I sure  
hope she's got more talent.

GRIMSBY

Oooh hoho! I'm not touching that  
one. Ladies and gentlemen, give it  
up for Carla Marrotty!

Applause as CARLA walks onto the stage. She does bare a striking resemblance to Paris Hilton. She is customarily confident, happy at the chance to show her stuff. Cliff, behind the stage curtain, glazed-over eyes on Carla.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Carla, we're happy to have you on  
the show.

CARLA

(I know)  
Thank you.

GRIMSBY

What are you going to sing for us  
tonight?

CARLA

I'm going to do [**\*see note below.\***]

\*

[ALL REFERENCE TO MUSIC WITHHELD PENDING TRADE MARK APPROVAL.]

GRIMSBY

I love that song.

DAVID

I love it more, honey.

She smiles sultry.

GRIMSBY

Ok, Carla. You're on.

He walks off the stage. The bright-sided set now becomes a  
starlit evening. Up with the swell as Carla moves into the  
spotlight...

CARLA

(singing)

\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_

She's awful. A walrus during mating season. The studio  
audience shares the same nails-on-chalkboard look.

Cliff looks his audience over from above as Lelioblokem starts  
to dance out.

LELIOBLOKEM

Well you couldn't possibly be any  
worse than the airhead you resemble,  
but you're every bit as bad.

Later ...Carla hangs from the ceiling by her ankles in the  
dungeon. Mistress Rhea sprays her in the face with a hose.

The audience in stitches.

Cliff ingests the laughter and applause now without the least  
concern.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT - LATER

Manny stands just behind Cliff as they watch a new CONTESTANT  
who seems to be imitating a frog. The audience boo's...

CLIFF

Jesus!

MANNY

I know, intensely stupid, isn't it?

Frogboy's already with his punisher, Lelio moving away. Mistress Rhea takes frogboy by the scruff, daggers in her eyes, points toward the pillory.

But frogboy, freaking, shakes free of her grip and shouts...

FROGBOY

Stoppppppp!!!!

Mistress Rhea now looks for Grimsby, who's on his way over to end the segment.

MANNY

Oh no, we've gotta do something about that.

Cliff looks askance at Manny.

MANNY (CONT'D)

What? That's a deal breaker. ...No?

Cliff turns back to see frogboy strolling offstage with Grimsby.

We move up, out of the sound stage through a transparent roof, into...

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

Stars glisten in the blackness of space. We hear LAUGHTER and CRIES from the show as a spent star races across the firmament...

SUPER IMPOSE

"WEDNESDAY"

Night folds rapidly into day as we move to reveal...

EXT. STUDIO - MORNING

The changing of the gate guard. Early traffic coming through in dribs.

INT. CLIFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

Cliff sits at desk twiddling his thumbs. He rises abruptly, paces the room. Stops, opens window. Hears BIRDS CHIRPING on this clear sunny morning. A KNOCK AT DOOR.

CLIFF

Come in.

The door opens and Linda is standing there with a wide smile. She's holding the overnights, the bread-and-butter ratings on which everything spins.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

You're smiling.

LINDA

We're golden! Twenty-seven share!  
We beat Idol, Housewives! All of  
them! We're a hit!

He takes the ratings from her, looks them over. He throws them up in the air. He wraps his arms around her, picks her up and dances around as they hoot and holler.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A row of newspaper machines -- The Daily News, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, all carrying a front page story of Extreme Audition's success: 'Hits a Hit! - 'Extreme Idles Idol' - 'Faux Paris Hilton and Fellow Bumpkins Get the Big Boot'.

INT. EXTREME FRONT OFFICE - DAY

The SECRETARY answers a full board of incoming calls...

SECRETARY

Extreme Audition productions...

EXT. HOLLYWOOD MOUNTAINS - DAY

We move briskly down Hollywood boulevard and up to the Hollywood sign.

TADESCU (V.O.)

Yes, Barry Tadescu calling from King Productions. Larry would like to have Mr. Treadwell on the show...

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Hi, Jill, Ron Epstein over at ET. Let's do a segment on the show...

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Marsha Platt calling from The View. We'd love to have Ms. Lipshitz on.

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - DAY

A swarm of tourists shopping, ogling hand and footprints.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Tanya Lowell from the Today Show.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Jill! Kyle Damato calling from Good Morning America.

EXT. NEWSSTAND - DAY

Time Magazine's cover features the stage of Extreme with the Paris Hilton look-alike getting dowsed.

NEWS CASTER (V.O.)

Despite vigorous protest from both religious and citizen's groups, the new talent show Extreme Audition, in which contestants are tortured with their consent, has broken all previous ratings records.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - DAY

Cliff, crew and staff gather for a meeting. Seems Cliff has changed his wardrobe. His posture's different too; that native humility of his taking a back seat to pride.

NEWS CASTER (V.O.CONTD.)

Asked why the creators of the show felt the need to inflict pain upon its participants, Craig Ford, spokesman for the show replied...

CRAIG FORD (V.O.)

'Well, couldn't we actually ask the same thing of the participants? I mean, some of them are coming in here, subjecting us to some pretty awful experiences.

NEWS CASTER (V.O.)

Ford went so far as to portend a philosophical perspective...

CRAIG FORD (V.O.)

I think we can observe this in life. Don't we? How often have we seen pride, vanity, go unchallenged? I think it's why you see what you see on the cover of Time this week with the Paris Hilton look-alike. People get a little tired of it. Ha ha! I heard someone suggest that we should have Anne Coulter on the show.

Cliff moves to the center of the group, no smiles, all business.

CLIFF

Alright, folks. We done good. Now we gotta do better.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Bobby and Lona are sitting on the couch together. Both of them are reading the Time mag Bobby holds open.



LONA

Baby, I'm gettin' a bad feelin' about this. Look how they did that girl!

BOBBY BROOKS

Come own, pumpkin pa. Git with the program. Yer lookin' at this the exact wrong way.

He closes the mag for emphasis.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

Aw. Am gownna bie. Own a show, that's featured own the cover of Taam magazine! Na it jus don't git no better'n at, honey!

LONA

...Alrat then. If you say so.

BOBBY BROOKS

You saw that girl. If ye ask me, she oughta be doin' taam with that squeak box she got.

LONA

Ha ha ha ha! She should too!

INT. CLIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Cliff and Linda are going over notes, eating sandwiches.

LINDA

She's already into the dish thing with her stand up now.

CLIFF

Yeah, I think it's a good idea.

LINDA

Another thing I was thinking... It might not be a bad idea to give Mistress Rhea and Cheney a couple of... underlings. You know, makes them sort of more... magisterial in a way and it also opens up the possibilities for the extreme side.

CLIFF

...I like that.

Later. They've repositioned themselves, continue to brainstorm...

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Well, we control the negative. And a little goes a long way.

LINDA

I agree. Something tells me you'll have a hell of a time convincing anyone else of that, though.

INT. CLIFF'S DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

Wendy and Cliff sit across from each other at the dinning table. A CHEF lays dinner out for them and exits.

Wendy's had a makeover. She holds herself differently; an important, regal woman now.

WENDY

I'm having Cochet come in and redo the family room.

CLIFF

The fa... ? What's wrong with it?

WENDY

What's wrong with the show?

CLIFF

...Nothing's wrong with the show.

WENDY

Then why are you making changes?

CLIFF

...Making it better.

WENDY

Ditto.

He studies her as she spoons up her baby peas ever-so-neatly.

CLIFF

Baby, is something bothering you?

She looks at him in earnest.

WENDY

No, baby. Why?

CLIFF

You seem... I don't know... Stiff, like you're mad or something.

A tear rises in her eye. She fans it away.

WENDY

That's just because... I don't know. I didn't have the advantage of finishing school early on and I want to be... perfect for you.

Cliff devours this food of love. Relaxes in his response.

CLIFF

Oh, honey. ...Yeah. I see it now.  
I'm just so stupid about that stuff.  
Thank god one of us knows the right  
way about these things.

They eat in a pleasant bubble.

INT. LINDA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Linda lies in a steaming bubble bath holding a glass of white wine, watching 'A Brief Encounter' on a portable tv. She downs a chocolate from a box on a chair and washes it down with the wine when the PHONE rings. She pounces on it.

LINDA

Yes? ...Oh. Hi, mom. Nothing.  
Actually... I'm working. Can I call  
you back?

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

All the principles are in place. Cliff and Linda are watching inconspicuously from back of the audience aisles near the exits. The lights dim.

DIRECTOR

Quiet on the set.

The DRUMROLL sounds...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening  
and welcome. You have purchased a  
first class ticket to the most watched  
theatrical and entertainment auditions  
in the world! Sit back now and  
enjoy... Extreme Audition!

Insane applause as the lights come up and out struts Grimsby.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

A satellite, 22,000 miles from earth, in quiet orbit.

GRIMSBY (V.O.)

Welcome to our second show of Extreme  
Audition! If you thought Monday's  
show was exciting, just wait till  
you see what we've got in store for  
you tonight. But first, coming to  
us from on high, let's say hello to  
our panel of judges...

INT. BURNETTE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Bob Burnette's hold up, watching the show, chipmunking his nails.

GRIMSBY (ON TV)  
'Evening, panel.

JUDGES (ON TV)  
Hi, Gary... Gary...

GRIMSBY  
You won't be too harsh on me tonight?

DAVID (ON TV)  
Wimp!

KATHY (ON TV)  
Wuss!

Laughter.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Grimsby turns to the audience.

GRIMSBY  
I guess we better bring out our first  
contestant?

Laughter. Cliff looks upward from the aisle at the audience;  
the lively interest of every face.

Back to Grimsby...

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
Ladies and gentlemen, from Muncie,  
Indiana, Erin McDough!

Later...

ERIN MCDOUGH, 20's, tells jokes to the audience.

ERIN  
Ok, here's a dilemma. You're in New  
Orleans, 'thick of the hurricane and  
floods. All you've got's a camera.  
You see a man in the water, fighting  
for his life. He looks familiar.  
You move closer and see it's George  
Bush! The raging waters are about  
to take him. You have two options.  
Save one of the world's most powerful  
men, or shoot a Pulitzer prize winning  
photo. Now here's the question.  
Would you select color film, or rather  
go with the simplicity of classic  
black and white?

About 78 percent of the audience laughs.

Later...

LIZBETH TRAIL, a pale bulimic gym bunny, squeals and squeaks out a Britney Spears tune.

Lelioblokem appears and tries to drown her out with insults.

LELIOBLOKEM

You stink! And eat a cheeseburger,  
you sad rake! Don't you know what a  
note is? We know you do war siren.

Later...

...Lizbeth is bound on all fours to the floor. In front of her is a tub of water. Mistress Rhea grabs Lizbeth by the hair and dunks her head in the tub. The audience cheers and laughs vigorously.

Later...

FRED 'FLINSTONE' BLAHA, a 40-ish bus driver with old baby fat, does a nimble-footed dance with song.

And here comes Lelioblokem.

LELIOBLOKEM (CONT'D)

You're the reason political  
correctness is so harmful. How would  
you ever benefit if no one ever told  
you what a fat nothing you are?

Cliff, in the booth, stares down at the man in sympathy.

Later...

...Fred Flinstone Blaha hangs by the ankles on a fat rope. No water awaits Fred. With a helmet on, he's swung vigorously by Cheney into a thick gym mat on the wall. The mat is riveted with metal spikes big enough so as not to draw blood.

Now Cheney turns Fred's body around to expose his ruddy back. And though we find there is a blood bead or two after all, it's really the stunned, dumb look on Flinstone's face that gets the audience going.

...Kathy Griffin looks drugged. David Allen Grier looks angry, aloof. Wendy looks superior, and gloriously bored.

Later...

The itemless juggler we saw earlier in the preliminaries is doing his thing. The audience is entranced by the sheer unbridled stupidity of it. Now come the BOO's. Lelioblokem comes out and just pelts him with eggs. Grimsby comes out and stops him.

LELIOBLOKEM (CONT'D)

You stupid worthless nothing pig!

GRIMSBY

Thank you, Lelio.

Lelio walks off. The audience quiets.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Jeez, Billy, that was quite possibly the dumbest act I've ever seen.

What are you, a juggler or a mime or...? Never mind. Judges, what'll ya give Billy here?

KATHY

Do we have to dignify it with a response?

GRIMSBY

Yes, please.

The judges punch in their votes. 7 - 8 - 10.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Seven, eight and a ten! That's a total of 25! Divided by three it gives you an eight and change.

Oohs and aahs from the audience.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

(to contestant)

'Wish you were on another show, huh?

INT. SMALLBERG'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Smallberg, sitting on his couch with a beer, leans forward as Grimsby escorts Billy to the dungeon side.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Mistress Rhea wins the bid. She collars Billy, tugs him to the wall and ties him spread-eagled to it. She locks his head in place in a vice.

Move to reveal Cliff at the rear of the bleachers, watching Mistress Rhea do her work.

She goes over to her throne, picks up a tiny bell and rings it. GROM, a dwarf in a blue silk robe comes out of one of the dungeon doors carrying a black leather case. He hobbles over to Mistress Rhea, stands prostrate next to her as they study their subject.

GROM

Where shall I begin the punishment?

MISTRESS RHEA

Start with the scalp and work toward the face.

Grom cackles and gurgles with delight as he moves toward Billy. He sets his case on a stool and opens it.

BILLY

What is this?!

MISTRESS RHEA

Silence, sinner!

Grom wastes no time taking a pair of swimmers goggles out of the case and fitting them over Billy's eyes.

Now Grom reaches into his case and pulls out several small needles. The crowd gasps.

Cliff, angst on his face, turns to look up into the booth at Linda, sees she's deliberately not watching the segment. He turns back to watch the punishment, throws his head back as if to watch 'openmindedly'. But he's affected, no doubt.

On the stage, as the haunting dirge begins to play, Grom encroaches on Billy. Slowly now, Grom starts piercing the top of Billy's head with the needles. One by one. Billy moans with displeasure at each puncture. The audience is repelled. A devilish laugh comes from Mistress Rhea, and a dark wilted smile.

Grom continues, now placing needles in Billy's face.

BILLY

Ngngaaaaaahhh!

INT. SMALLBERG'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben growls, crushes his beer can and throws it at the set.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Grom inserts the last needle into Billy's cheek and steps away. Billy gasps as the section of wall where he's bound rotates and he disappears. The audience is silent. The lights go down.

MANNY (V.O.)

Let not your heart be troubled.  
Applause is not the only sign they'll  
come back in droves.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A desktop. A newspaper is thrown onto it. The front page picture is of Billy with the needles in his face and head. The headline reads: 'What is this?!'

Move to reveal Art, sitting at the desk. Across from him are Cliff, Linda, Manny and Sylvia. Art's look is somber.

MONEY

Whose idea was this?

CLIFF

It sort of came from all of us.

Art stands. Walks over to the window with his back to them.

MONEY

Well. I think it's... it was extraordinary.

(turning)

Brilliant.

Cliff and Linda relax a little.

CLIFF

Manny was... most instrumental in...

MONEY

It's just the kind of controversy we want. When Amnesty International complains, they're going to look like fools. I'm waiting for them. After what they did to two of our shows last year. You guys are getting on my good side with clever. Ok that's it. Make yourselves available to the press, but mums the word on the wherefore until I say.

INT. LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Linda is on the phone.

She has two tv sets, both on -- Fox, and MSNBC, two stations at opposite ends of the political spectrum until they have actual news, like now; a pair of PRETTY TWINS, age 8, is featured, with the exact same photo on both channels. And it's a sad day as we see the caption on both screens:

'Amber alert - Katherine and Stacey Rohnert missing'.

LINDA

(into phone)

Yes... Well, yes, I'd love to be on the show if you still have an opening.

There's a knock on the door.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Come in.

Wendy enters, sexily dressed, carrying a small gift-wrapped package. Linda gestures for her to sit, which Wendy does.



LINDA (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Yes... Yes, I have that day open.  
 Yes. ...Alright. Very good then!  
 Yes. Good-bye.

She puts the phone down and looks up at Wendy.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
 Is something wrong?

WENDY  
 No. I came to... I wanted to thank  
 you for the advice you gave me the  
 other day on the set and...  
 (holding up package)  
 I brought you something.

She hands her the package. Beat. Linda takes, unwraps it.  
 A music box.

WENDY (CONT'D)  
 You like it?

Wendy takes it, winds it up. It plays. Linda stops it.

LINDA  
 It's nice, Wendy. Thank you. But  
 I'm really very busy right now, ok?

WENDY  
 I understand. I won't keep you.

She gets up and they walk to the door together.

But Fox and MSNBC have presently gone their separate ways.

EXT. BOBBY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Crickets chirp under a full moon in an otherwise silent night.

CUT TO

Full screen view of Larry King's face in sad repose.

LARRY KING  
 Once again, if you have any  
 information regarding these two girls,  
 please call the number on the bottom  
 of your screen.

Move to reveal that we're in...

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby and Lona are having dinner, watching the show. The tv  
 screen cuts to the photos of the two Rohnert girls at some  
 earlier time in their lives.

LARRY KING (CONTD.)

(on tv)

...After the break. Clifford  
Treadwell, creator of... 'Extreme  
Audition'. Don't go 'way.

Lona gets up and collects the empty plates.

LONA

That's so sad.

BOBBY BROOKS

Bring me another beer, honey.

Lona exits.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

If somebody took them girls, Aw'd  
lack jus 2 minutes with 'em in a  
locked room.

EXT./INT. CIRCUIT CITY - NIGHT

In the window, a bank of tv sets vie for our attention.  
Larry comes back on 9 of them.

CUT TO

Full screen view of Larry, back now with Cliff.

LARRY KING

He's the man who came up wit da show  
everyone's talking about. Clifford  
Treadwell is my guest. Welcome.

CLIFF

Thank you, Larry.

LARRY KING

The cover of Time, front page of the  
New York Times, L.A. Times. They're  
calling him needle head, the one on  
this weeks...

CLIFF

You mean Billy Huckaby?

LARRY KING

All those needles in his head and  
face, looks like that movie... monster  
guy's all white and full o' pins  
everywhere.

CLIFF

Ha ha!

(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Well, first of all it's not a monster movie... Grom... well, his real name is Dennis Levy... he's a specialist in his field. And Mr. Huckaby was never in any real da...

LARRY KING

Specialist in his field? What's he, an interrogator?

CLIFF

No. In fact he's actually a doctor. And what you saw on the show the other night happens every day in thousands of offices across the country and the world.

INT. "THE VIEW" SOUND STAGE - DAY

Linda sits on the couch with the cast of The View. She's in mid-explanation.

LINDA

He's an acupuncturist!

THE GIRLS

Oooh!

LINDA

And the funny thing, Billy Huckaby confessed that he was an insomniac. And quite coincidentally, he was able to get the first decent nights sleep in months after the show.

The girls look at each other in pleasant surprise as the explanation washes over them, and the audience.

INT. HOTEL - BALLROOM - DAY

A town meeting. DEBBIE DOOLEY, the Amnesty International attorney we heard from earlier has the mic.

DEBBIE DOOLEY

But what about the others? You can't tell me that being whipped with wet towels, or having the full force of a fire hose shot into your face and mouth are forms of therapy.

GWEN PHIFAL, attractive P.R. liaison for the show, is much more relaxed than Dooley.

GWEN

Garden hose, not a fire hose. The show isn't about therapy, Ms. Dooley.

(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Entertainment is the venue, and let us not forget, these people have all given their consent, and are well within their rights to do so. They've all been medically examined, psychologically screened and were chosen, Ms. Dooley, over thousands of others, by process of elimination, to be on the show. Are you saying that you, and people like you should be able to decide what they can and cannot do of their own free will?

DEBBIE DOOLEY

I'm saying that the 'process of elimination' you speak of is bound to become a lot darker than the "innocent" entertainment that you portray it to be.

GWEN

Thank god we live in a free country where people are able to express their opinions as you are doing right now, Ms. Dooley.

At the back of the room we see Ben Smallberg moving inconspicuously toward the exit doors.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

BUD PIERCE, a no neck muscle-bound man in his 20's, is the current contestant. He's a rapper, or perhaps we should say, he's rapping...

BUD

When I'm ge'in wit you close, you know my rappin be the mos'. I set my thug for the nap and let the necta run like sap.

LELIOBLOKEM (V.O.)

Is it possible that you have no idea how absolutely dim you are?

Later ...Bud is strapped into the electric chair. Cheney is at the controls, juicing him up. When Cheney slams the juice lever down, the current compels Bud's muscles to strain and his veins to pulse out. But he's smiling like some good-sport/crazy-bastard, and the audience is giddy from the comical image of a man laughing at his own controlled electrocution.

Cliff, in the booth, manages a little laughter, glances over at Linda who has her nose buried in her notes.

Later ...The DOG MAN, the one who does the canine impressions, tries desperately to dissuade the crowd from laughing at his expense by doing, more passionately, the very thing they're laughing at.

LelioBlokem comes out.

LELIOBLOKEM (CONT'D)

You're really worse than horrible.  
Bad upon bad. You could be the poster  
boy for hopeless.

Later ...Dog man finds himself in the arms of a SUMO WRESTLER who squeezes his guts in a bear hold under Cheney's stern-faced command. Dog man looks, for seconds at a time, like he thinks he'll actually explode. Now the Sumo runs him into a mat on the dungeon wall and Dog man goes down, lies semiconscious on the stage floor. Cheney wakes him, dousing him with a bucket of ice water, and the Sumo drags him off stage to charged applause.

Later ...A SONGSTRESS, in her 20's, dressed like Baby Jane, is booed by all. Lelio's there, in her face, chewing her out in the ruckus.

LELIOBLOKEM (CONT'D)

Honey, you should be working some  
boulevard somewhere. You should be  
prohibited from speaking, let alone...  
squealing like that.

And we get a glimpse of the newly addicted fan base. Infinitely more engaged than a Jerry Springer audience. Laughing, clapping, nakedly chanting their passions like Middle Age villagers on beheading day. Cliff, sitting among the audience, eyes closed, listening to the circus-like noises of his unprecedented success.

Later ...Mistress Rhea is seeing to this 'squealing' Dandie Dinmont mollycoddle with her smeared make up, wild hair and ambitious notion of stardom. With an electric wand she terrorizes the disillusioned malcontent. And the audience gluts every slightest nuance like delicacies, roaring with applause as they go.

Later ...Grimsby's got that chastising smile on. The one that tells our audience they're about to get some more. The artistic aspirant who rates Grimsby's simper is one CHRISTINA BOVINE, a slight, pale woman in her 20's.

Later ...The crowd gasps and laughs with excitement as Christina Bovine sits in a chair in the dungeon, her feet and hands bound. Cheney himself shaves off all her hair as she cries. When she's finally bald, Cheney's assistant cleans the fallen hair on Christina's face and neck with the water hose. Before she even has time to recover from the shock, she's untied, stood up, made to stand on a rotating disk in the floor and spun around slowly for the world to see.

Cliff walks the plank. Sorry. Silent.

Later ...A big breasted overweight WOMAN with bad posture dances like Shakira, but doesn't have the same precision or finish as the Latin sexpot.

Lelio appears, yacking at her, offering her a sports bra.

Later ...The bouncy boobey girl is strung to a stretching machine, and Mistress Rhea is turning the wheel, straightening her out. -- A stiff, scruffy back-row audience member's eyes roll up into his head. A SHOW ATTENDANT directs SECURITY to remove him.

Later ...SHEENA LASSITER, a beautiful woman in her early twenties is singing a song with a silky voice. A voice to die for. She doesn't need Extreme Audition, they need her. The audience is her putty. There's not a peep from anyone, anywhere, as she treats...

SHEENA  
(singing)

INT. BOBBY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Bobby is packing his bags. He's excited, a little nervous.

SHEENA  
(singing)

---

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Bobby and Lona arrive at the terminal in a cab.

SHEENA  
(singing)

---

EXT. SKY - DAY

Bobby and Lona's plane glistens in sunlight as it soars above a carpet of clouds.

SHEENA  
(singing)

---

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Bobby and Lona exit cab, make their way into the hotel.

SHEENA  
(singing)

---

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Bobby and Lona check in. BELLBOY leads way to elevators.

SHEENA  
(singing)

---

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby and Lona enter. Bobby tips the bellboy and closes the door. Lona runs to the window and looks out. Bobby looks around the room. He goes over to her at the window and embraces her from behind. It's quiet but for the distant sound of anxious motorists in their evening rush down below.

Move to reveal the tv set, dead, cold gray. Suddenly, CLICK, it belches and comes to life... an image... slowly takes shape... It is the face of a MAN. Rough hewn, scared, cold and hungry. Now the caption below him sharpens and informs us that he is...

BERNHARD MOLLET.

The tv picture switches from the photo of Mollet to a video of him in handcuffs being guided from an old barn house to a police car. Mollet bares a remote resemblance to Bobby.

Two photos appear in the upper left hand corner of the tv screen above the drooping head of Mollet, who tries to hide his face from cameras. The pictures are of the Rohnert twins.

LONA (O.S.)  
Oh jeez, no! Turn it up.

NEWS CASTER (V.O.)  
...was found in Mollet's bathroom,  
as well as a small compartment in  
his basement where it's believed he  
kept the girls. He was immediately  
arrested on suspicion of the murders.

Lona tears.

LONA  
Monster.

BOBBY BROOKS  
'Monster' don't get it.

EXT. FREEWAY - ELECTRIC TRAFFIC SIGN - NIGHT

The sign with the amber alert for Katherine and Stacey Rohnert swipes to black. Now a traffic report is featured.

INT. CLIFF'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Cliff is brushing his teeth. Wendy comes in, picks up a bottle of lotion and starts lotioning her arms.

WENDY

They found those girls.

Cliff stops brushing his teeth, looks at her.

WENDY (CONT'D)

Murdered by some animal.

He turns away in disgust.

INT. LINDA'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Linda turns her radio up...

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

...found together in a ditch about five miles from the suspects house. A woman walking her dog, reported seeing a man acting strangely in the area. Police matched her description with a caller's who lives near Mollet.

She turns it off, stares out into the night.

BLACKOUT

FADE UP ON

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - DAY

A hot, smoggy day. Move to reveal Bobby and Lona strolling down the blvd., eating pizza, taking in the sites. They pass a newsstand where we see...

...the pock-marked face of Bernhard Mollet plastered on a number of the dailies. On further examination, the resemblance between Mollet and Bobby is a little more than remote. It's not like Bobby could be the killer. But cousins wouldn't be much of a stretch.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Most of the contestants are mulling around a table with a coffee machine and boxes of donuts.

Bobby's pacing, nervously mouthing the words of his song. He notices a small, dark, nondescript girl in her 20's leaning against the curtain, staring at him. He shoots her a friendly smile. Realizing he's smiling at her, she turns, walks away.

INT. EXTREME CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Cliff is talking to the director in the booth. Manny hovers.



INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

The crew is setting the final touches before the show goes up. Grimsby's huddled with the judges.

FADE TO BLACK

Hold on the black, as out of the silence, comes the ominous DRUMROLL...

And now the gamey voice of our announcer...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome! You are about to participate in the show the whole country's talking about. Yes! It's showtime! So sit back, relax and enjoy tonight's installment of... Extreme Audition!

The lights come up to eager applause...

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

...and for the next 17 minutes we'll hear the cackles and giggles, the applause and cries, the screams and bellowing laughter through...

...The natural born THESPIAN doing Macbeth -- and the unanimous adulation he inspires. ...The inflexible IMPRESSIONIST -- and how he negotiates a walk on hot coals. ...A stand up COMEDY TEAM OF BROTHERS -- and their hilarious physical comedy exit to cheers. ...A MALE SINGER, impressed with his own feeble baritone -- and how Cheney impresses upon him the seriousness of his artistic felony on the spikes of an inquisition chair. ...A TAP STEP MAN -- who floats off the stage in happy-footed farewell, having secured the judge's spirited approval.

Grimsby. Now stands center stage to introduce...

GRIMSBY

Bobby Brooks, ladies and gentlemen!

Bobby comes out from backstage, pumped and looking strong.

Move to reveal an AUDIENCE MEMBER, as the thrills in evidence on her face dissolve and she leans to her PARTNER to whisper...

AUDIENCE MEMBER

He looks just like that guy!

PARTNER

What g...? Oh yeah... He does!

We see the same association being made by others in the crowd.

CUT TO

Grimsby. Shaking Bobby's hand...

GRIMSBY

Mechanic, hm! Well, Bobby, what are you going to sing for us this evening?

BOBBY BROOKS

A song by Tim McGraw called, [\*].

Grimsby offers Bobby the stage with a gesture and moves off.

Bobby steps across to the bright side as his music cues. And he begins the two minutes that will lay out his destiny. He gets off to a strong start. Pleased with the intro, he begins to feel relaxed. At home. The notes come easily. He's harnessed the charge of his massive audience so far and is probably singing his best.

But something else is happening. Something non-sequitur and out of his control. The audience, for some reason, is not all in allegiance, as it easily might be. Some are subconsciously ill-at-ease, shifting in their seats, thinking about other things, sporadically coming back to him. Coughing, shifting, scratching, whispering.

Cliff notices from the booth.

Linda senses it from offstage. She starts down a side corridor toward the stairs to the booth.

Another audience member concludes, ever-so-subtly, what it is he doesn't like about this one. It's his looks. He tips his head and looks away in tinny distraction.

Bobby. Keenly aware in the hot light of attention that something's wrong, but having no clue what; singing well, alongside a nervous sense of impending disaster.

The judges, relegated to Bobby's profile, weighing decision.

But Bobby, wired in now to the sense of discomfort that seems to be gradually blanketing the audience, slips up the slightest bit. It magnifies the audience's disconnect, and growing distaste. And suddenly, out of the mass, comes a single, inebriated voice...

MALE VOICE

...Boooooo!

Then another. And another. And soon, most the audience joins in...

AUDIENCE

Booooooooooo!!

And everything grinds to a halt.

BACK STAGE

...where Grimsby, confused by the audience's swift appraisal, starts toward the curtain.

THE SOUND STAGE

Where Lelio has arrived and stares, confused, at Bobby. And we see the abyss of his open mouth as he wrawls his insults. Bobby looks at him, sees him talking (in slo-mo), but the voice is drowned out by the DISTORTED sounds of BOOING AND LAUGHTER.

Lelio moves away. Bobby, now standing alone in a quandary turns uncomfortably (in slo-mo), to Grimsby as he arrives. Normal speed of motion returns as Grimsby speaks.

GRIMSBY

Seems you've run into a bit of a snag, Bobby.

Bobby stares blankly at him.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Uh... earth to Bobby...

Laughter. Bobby comes out of it.

BOBBY BROOKS

Sorry, what?

GRIMSBY

I said you seem to have run into the audience's disfavor.

Bobby tries to pull himself together.

BOBBY BROOKS

Uh... What happens now?

GRIMSBY

Well, we still have to hear from our judges, but by order, the audience has already sealed your fate. You're going to the dungeon. The rest is just a matter of your score. Judges!

Wendy, comfortable now in her role, confident in her new look, is quick with her judgment, as if matching it from memory with the audience jeers. 9.

Kathy and David look like goofy twins. Something about their consciences and artistic integrity being put to the test. Out of the blue, they look at each other, and seeing the same expression as what they're feeling, they both laugh. David covers for both of them. He turns to Grimsby...

DAVID  
Lemme 'axe' you som'm.

GRIMSBY  
Hm?

DAVID  
We couldn't see too well from here...  
is he missing any teeth?

Kathy bursts out laughing. Alone.

GRIMSBY  
Missing teeth? No, I...

KATHY  
It's the vowels, David...

DAVID  
...Because we...

GRIMSBY  
Guys. Vowels and missing teeth?  
Cut me some slack here. You gotta  
give me a little more than that.  
What, you saying you liked it?

DAVID  
I'm not gonna go that far...

KATHY  
No, but the audience sounds like we  
should be chopping his head off.

Bobby, armed now with this proof, turns, looks at Grimsby.

Cliff, all eyes and ears.

Grimsby, in a tight spot, feels Bobby's gaze but avoids it.  
His eyes, shifting in search of the proper response, find  
Wendy's score display. He quickly points to it.

GRIMSBY  
Well, at least one of you is certain.  
(to David and Kathy)  
Come on, you two. We're all waiting.

David is about to make a reply. But it's too late, the mob  
has begun its chant...

AUDIENCE  
Ex-treme ex-treme ex-treme....

David and Kathy punch in their scores. A pair of threes.  
The chanting is quieted.

GRIMSBY

Ok, a nine and two threes. Fifteen divided by three gives Bobby a score of five.

(gesturing)

This way, Bobby.

Bobby. Reluctantly follows Grimsby to the dark side as the audience applauds. Mistress Rhea and Cheney are standing at the wheel, ready to make their bids.

Grimsby spins the wheel, and the punishers make their tosses. Cheney - 8. Mistress Rhea - 2.

Cliff ducks down into a back row seat to watch.

Grimsby turns to Bobby, who's staring hard at Cheney.

GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

It's your turn, my friend.

Grimsby books the hell outta there, leaving Bobby with the primetime sadists.

As Mistress Rhea returns to her throne, Cheney moves toward Bobby. He grabs him by the back of the neck and Bobby starts. Cheney looks him in the eye with a mix of mock anger and apprehension. He pushes Bobby toward the dungeon wall.

Bobby's all at sea. Not wanting to go, yet not wanting to break with the comportment of the show, he drags his feet, like a Roman slave, to chains hanging off the dungeon wall.

Cheney hastily raises Bobby's hands above his head and cuffs him to the chains. An almost imperceptible sigh of relief and Cheney straightens up, claps his hands once.

As Bobby tugs, testing the chains, a GEORGE BUSH LOOK-ALIKE comes out from a dungeon door. He walks over to Bobby. He pulls out...

BUSH LOOK-ALIKE

Veto pen, ladies and gentlemen.

It's hard work!

He starts cutting the material of Bobby's pant leg around the upper thigh with the pen. Bobby turns left and right looking over his back to see what he's doing. Bush-like now rips off both pant legs and shows Cheney what a good job he did. Cheney nods his approval. Now Bush-like cuts Bobby's shirt with the pen, rips it off and writes 'Veto' on his back. He bows to Cheney, balls up the pant legs and shirt and trots off the stage with a mud-eating grin.

Cliff, watching Lona, a few rows down, in tears. And popping off all around her, the nervous laughter which precedes the punisher's full-fledged commitment.

Now Cheney takes a leather flogger from a rack. He moves in to Bobby...

BOBBY BROOKS

Hey, what are ye doin?

Bobby yanks his chains.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

Hey, man!

Cheney lays into Bobby, thwacking him with the flogger. Bobby squirms, tugs on his chains.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

(sotto voce)

You son-of-a-bitch.

...Cheney rips into Bobby's thighs... and calves.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

Quit!

Bobby's red with anger. And embarrassment. He tugs at the chains.

Cheney, drunk in the heady execution of his duties, and the CHEERING ADULATION, for the apprehension he felt, and the control he now wields, scales the flogger high and comes down hard across Bobby's red back. And up again... Down again...

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

Quit, you bastard!

Cliff, looking away. Nowhere to go.

Cheney, in the flow, doling out his measure... THWWAASH! across Bobby's shoulders.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

Aaaaaaah!!

Bobby, pulls his chains.

Cliff, watching again. Looking up at...

...the chains -- coming out of the wall. Move to reveal the shock on Cheney's face. Move to reveal Bobby, turning to Cheney and grabbing him in rage.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!!!!

As Bobby starts to choke Cheney, FIVE SECURITY MEN appear out of thin air and take Bobby down.

BOBBY BROOKS (CONT'D)

Git awf mie! You see what he de-id?

They cuff him, and with genuine violence yank him up, haul him out the dungeon doors.

Cheney coughs up some comeuppance, but hides it well. Turns to the audience with an icy smile.

As Grimsby starts onto the stage, the lights fade quickly to black, making it clear to most the quieted live audience that it's a gaff.

Move to reveal Cliff, standing in the pale light of the booth with a headset on. He turns to look over at Linda just outside the booth and she looks at him. Manny and Sylvia are moving along the back wall in stealth toward the booth.

MONEY (V.O.)

I don't give a shit! They're GONE!  
Both of them!

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Arty stews in his chair. Cliff, Linda, Manny and Sylvia all here, the faces grim.

MONEY

They're not supposed to take control of the fucking show like that! I mean if the audience is booing the guy, who are they to get in between that? Now what about this contestant?

SYLVIA

They shouldn't have, but the guards let him go when they got him outside. He left before we could talk to him.

LINDA

He's not at the hotel, we've been trying to reach him...

MONEY

You know what it means? Law suit.

CLIFF

That's a bit of a... I don't think...

MANNY

Technically, sir, we could sue him. Breach of contract.

CLIFF

Well, technically, yes, but...

MONEY

No. Leave it alone. I think we maybe should send him a check anyway for the... then if he shows here, he's looking for something more, we... What are you editing over it?

Cliff looks over at Manny a flicker before...

CLIFF

That's one thing we wanted to talk to you about. We were wondering... I... was wondering if it wouldn't be a bad idea if we left it in.

MONEY

Left it in?!

MANNY

Why not, sir? It's very compelling. We're within our rights. We could reshoot Gary's re-entrance and...

MONEY

No fricken way, are you nuts?!

Beat. He looks at Linda.

MONEY (CONT'D)

You think this is a good idea?

Beat. Linda starts to smile diplomatically.

MONEY (CONT'D)

You guys'd have us all in the poor house. Not only is it a crazy idea. It's a... crazy idea!

MANNY

Sir, if I might...

They all turn to Manny.

MANNY (CONT'D)

It would be crazy, in another context, like... The Price is Right, Wheel of Fortune. But not here. What we saw here tonight wasn't much different from what you see on Jerry Springer every 5 to 7 minutes!

MONEY

No. They're 'stopping' violence that two people on the show are engaging in. That's different. They're not roughing them up for not taking their torture willingly. Jesus Christ, listen to me.



Cliff secretly watches Arty.

MANNY

It's the premise of the show, sir.  
And I consider this very discussion  
a means of bonding with the kind of  
show we've got. Now this country  
boy is... well we can't say for sure,  
but he's pissed. He's probably  
thinking about doing something  
legally. He's not "hurt". Ego and  
greed, that's what's driving him.  
...In my opinion, if we don't put an  
end to it, we're doing the other  
contestants a disservice. They've  
worked hard to get here. Why should  
someone who doesn't play by the rules  
get to profit? ...To say nothing of  
the money wasted by not using it.

Arty's language. He scratches an itch.

MONEY

Tsch! Are they having a sale on  
morality by-passes today?

CLIFF

I think it's a matter of...

MANNY

It could be argued that it's moral  
to leave it in and immoral to take  
it out. 'Lot of ways it could play.  
The one thing that's certain is that  
it's on tape. There's no morality  
or immorality about that. All we're  
really discussing now is whether  
it's better to show it, or to lie by  
pretending it didn't happen. And  
again, just my opinion, but I think  
taking it out puts us way behind  
most the shows out there in terms of  
being 'real' when it counts.

CLIFF

We did put soldiers out there, after  
the show. Asking the right questions.

MANNY

Getting the right answers.

MONEY

Like?

CLIFF

What they thought about it.

MANNY

Tsch! With some, it was a non-event.

CLIFF

(correcting him)

One.

MANNY

'Couple. They were a couple. The rest weren't much disturbed at all.

CLIFF

Well, a few of 'em...

MANNY

Yeah, nothing to write home about.  
...Look, I'm not saying it doesn't  
need to be cleaned up a bit.

Beat. Arty gets up. Paces a little. Stops, looks at watch.

MONEY

Get it in here, lemme see it again.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cliff and team start down the hall from Arty's office. Linda falls behind, leans against the wall. Cliff notices.

CLIFF

You two go ahead.  
(pointing at Manny)  
You chill, alright?

Manny smiles and he and Sylvia continue down the hall. Cliff goes over to Linda, sees she's crying.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

What is it?

LINDA

I'm sorry, I... You'll have to excuse  
me, I've got a terrible headache.

CLIFF

Go on home. I'll drop the tape off  
to you later. I'll call before.

She nods, starts up the hallway. He plods after the others.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Lona kneels by Bobby, who leans on the sink with just his underwear on. His legs are welts and red and covered with white cream. They ignore the PHONE RINGING in another room.

BOBBY BROOKS

Doctor said Aw should leave it own  
all nat. It don't hurt. Physically.  
What hurts is...

LONA

Baby, I told you we should'a gone on  
another show.

BOBBY BROOKS

Aw don't even get the consolation  
money na! Damn them bastards!

There's a KNOCK AT THE DOOR. They look at each other.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lona crosses to the door and looks out the peephole.

LONA

Yes?

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Ben Smallberg stands outside Bobby and Lona's door looking  
dapper and sincere.

SMALLBERG

Yes, hello, I'm sorry to bother you.  
My name is Benjamin Smallberg. I'm  
a television producer. Not from the  
studio that does Extreme Audition.  
Another one. And... I guess I'd  
like to say that if you aren't  
currently preparing or thinking of  
preparing a law suit against those  
people, I'd like to suggest that you  
do. And I've come to offer you any  
help in that regard that I can.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY/BAR - NIGHT

Smallberg, Bobby and Lona sit at a table by the bar.

SMALLBERG

No, I was there on another matter  
and happened to be watching, I think  
you're very talented.

BOBBY BROOKS

Thaink ye.

LONA

Sir, I can't describe how awful it  
would be if they put that on tv...

SMALLBERG

Well, what's important is that you've been disgraced. They need to know that. I know a very good lawyer who will take this case. 'Friend of mine. And frankly, in addition to righting the wrong, restoring your dignity, you'll never have to work another day in your life.

Bobby and Lona look at each other. Lona turns to Smallberg.

LONA

Well, yes!

BOBBY BROOKS

We'll take you up on that offer, Mr. Smallberg. Aw don't know exactly what happened in that audience. But somethin... Somethin Aw don't think Aw had anythang to do with... Hell, even the two judges, the real ones...

SMALLBERG

Like I said, you're talented. Ok. I'll pull around front. Hurry up, get what you need. 'Meet you outside.

They all rise.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Smallberg steps into the electric glimmer and sparkle that's Sunset Boulevard at night. Striding briskly toward his car, he takes his cell out, dials.

SMALLBERG

(into phone)

...It's me. It's all set. They're in. What happened over there?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Manny, on his cell, replies.

INTERCUT

MANNY

(into phone)

'Looks like it's gonna happen. Arty's waiting till the last minute to decide, but I think I convinced him.

SMALLBERG

Good. Good. Alright, 'should be all wrapped up here in an hour.

MANNY

Right. Time for the song and dance.

Manny ends the call, checks himself in the mirror.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Smallberg pulls up in his sedan as Bobby and Lona come out.

INT. SMALLBERG'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Bobby rides in front with Smallberg, Lona sits in back.

SMALLBERG

One important thing. After you've met the lawyer, you'll be dealing exclusively with him. There's no need to complicate matters by telling anyone that I hooked you guys up. 'That ok with you?

BOBBY BROOKS

'Never heard of ye.

They smile.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Audience is long gone. Sylvia sits in front row. Cliff and Manny stand at lip of stage with Arty as -- Grimsby makes his re-entrance for the camera crew.

DIRECTOR

Ok, that's good. We've got enough.

INT. OFFICE BLDG. - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Smallberg leads Bobby and Lona to a door that reads; Fred Fitch - Attorney at Law. He opens door, follows them in.

INT. EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

Cliff, Manny and Sylvia are with an EDITOR, and we watch as he splices Grimsby's new re-entrance over the gaff.

GRIMSBY

(on monitor to audience)  
I think we'll deduct the cost of damage to the wall out of his... severance package.

The editor adds a LAUGH TRACK. Cliff looks at his watch.

MANNY

It's seamless.

CLIFF

Yeah... fine.

EXT./INT. LAW OFFICE - NIGHT

Through the window we see Bobby sitting at a desk across from FRED FITCH, 50's. Lona sits beside him, Smallberg stands in the background.

INT. EXTREME SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

Cliff and Manny lock horns as they trek through the dark empty room toward the hallway light of the exit doors.

MANNY

Five last show, now you want seven?!

CLIFF

Hey, people are coming on to launch careers, ok? Along with the other...

MANNY

In the final rounds the jewel's out of the crown. Well, you've got the better talent, but you know what I'm saying. That's why we need to get them over with quickly.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cliff leads Manny out of the sound stage into the hallway.

MANNY

Putting all these passable ones on now, we'll end up in the finals a lot sooner and a lot longer than we've got any worldly business being! You don't shit on a hit.

CLIFF

It's my show, we're going to do it my way. You got a problem with that?

MANNY

Not at all! ...Not at all.

INT. LAW OFFICE - NIGHT

Smallberg sips coffee out in the lobby. Fitch sits with Bobby and Lona, urging them with an habitual placating nod...

FITCH

You've got to trust me to do the right thing by you? That's any lawyer.

BOBBY BROOKS

...Well I... yeah...

FITCH

What? What is it? What's wrong?

BOBBY BROOKS

(terrified)

I just really don't want 'em showin'  
that own tv for nothin'.

FITCH

...Don't concern yourself with that...

LONA

But we are concerned, Mr. Fitch...

FITCH

'Course you realize how much more  
you stand to gain if they did put it  
on? Whole different ball park.

BOBBY BROOKS

We don't care. We don't want it on.

FITCH

'Don't want it on. Ok.

He lights a cigarette. Offers them one.

FITCH (CONT'D)

The suit I'm going to confront them  
with, your segment won't even be on  
the table. Ok?

Lona and Bobby nod in the same rote fashion.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Manny follows Cliff up the corridor, being a nudge. Manny's  
a lot different than when we first met him. A surprise a  
minute. Presently very animated. Like he's either mentally  
challenged or brilliant. He's clearly unencumbered by the  
argument they've just had; the residue of which is still  
evident on Cliff's face.

MANNY

It's just an idea, brother, but a  
damned good one. Ready? ...Surgery!  
As in plastic.

CLIFF

What do you mean?

MANNY

Li'l nip/tuck. Ha ha! They score  
below a certain number, we give 'em  
a nose job. Or ear flaps and shit.

CLIFF

Ear flaps?

MANNY

You know, make 'em stick out. To use as an example. Or...

CLIFF

You mean make them look worse?

MANNY

Duh! There's not much point makin' 'em look better. ...Unless...

CLIFF

That's sick.

MANNY

Why? Why is it sick?

CLIFF

'Cause it's permanent, you sick fuck.

MANNY

Shit, it's all permanent. If it's permanent. ...So we pay 'em more!

Cliff frowns at him, walks out the door toward the parking lot. Manny watches him go, then turns the other way and heads up the stairs.

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

Bobby and Lona say goodbye to Smallberg and enter their airport terminal.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Art's at his desk. There's a KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

MONEY

Come in.

Manny pops his head in.

MONEY (CONT'D)

Come in, come in, Manny. ...He didn't seem to have his heart in it. Cliff, I mean.

Manny enters and sits.

MANNY

He seems to be softening his vision. And at what I think is the worst time. You know... we're new.

MONEY

Mhm, of course.



MANNY

I've made several suggestions for the show, things I thought to keep it cutting edge, and he... just sort of sloughs it off. I don't know.

Arty goes over to a mini-bar.

MONEY

What are you drinking?

MANNY

Scotch and soda'd be fine.

INT. CLIFF'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Cliff flips his cell open, dials...

CLIFF

(into phone)

I'm on my way. Be there in twenty.

INT. LINDA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Linda stands by the phone, cradling the receiver to her ear.

LINDA (V.O.)

See you then.

INT. SMALLBERG'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Smallberg checks his watch. Makes a cell call...

SMALLBERG

(into phone)

...Alright, Fitch. Make the call.

INT. LAW OFFICE - NIGHT

Fitch, alone at desk, on phone.

FITCH

(into phone)

Right.

He ends the call with Smallberg. Dials a new number.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Arty gazes out the window in thought. Manny stirs his drink with his finger, steals a look at his watch.

MANNY

It was just an odd coincidence. Meeting like that. I mean, here I was thinking, great, I'm going to a studio where two of my idols are!

(MORE)

MANNY (CONT'D)

And he ends up at my old studio.  
Anyway, we had coffee, chewed the  
fat. He speaks very highly of you.  
Still. ...Ha ha! And he was helpful  
in instructing me about holding a  
little back in my own... open display  
of admiration for both of you.

MONEY

Ben Smallberg's always been sharp as  
a tack.

MANNY

He is. He seems to have an innate  
sense of what to do in certain  
situations. Situations like the one  
we sort of find ourselves in righ...

MONEY

Yes he does, it's true what you say.

MANNY

...We should call him, sir.

MONEY

Ha! He wouldn't talk to me right  
now. After the way...

MANNY

Sir, if I can speak plainly... That  
day, he did mention what happened.  
And I remember this because to me it  
seemed, you know, so non-sequitor...  
but that he admired you, even at  
that point. He said for all the  
magic you'd made. ...So I asked  
him, would he come back... if asked,  
by you of course.

MONEY

What'd he say?

MANNY

In a heartbeat.

MONEY

Really?!

MANNY

Regretted leaving, you see?

MONEY

Hm! I never would have thought...

MANNY

As God is my witness.  
(MORE)

MANNY (CONT'D)  
 'Was inspiring to be frank. There's  
 something very, I don't know, classy  
 about it.

MONEY  
 I've always...

Arty's cell rings. He takes the call.

MONEY (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Yeah... Yes, what is it, Dorothy?  
 ...Who? ...What?!!

He covers the speaker and squalls to Manny.

MONEY (CONT'D)  
 They've already got a lawyer! Suing!

Manny feigns surprise.

EXT. LINDA APT BLDG. - NIGHT

Cliff pulls up, starts up the pathway to Linda's bldg.

But it's Manny's words we hear...

MANNY (V.O.)  
 Sir, Ben's a lawyer as well as a  
 producer. He'd definitely know how  
 to deal with this. Honestly, sir,  
 don't you think we should give him a  
 call?

MONEY (V.O.)  
 ...Alright what's his number?

Cliff holds the door for a couple coming out and steps inside.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Arty takes Manny's offered cell...

MONEY  
 (into cellphone)  
 Ben? ...How are you?!

EXT./INT. SMALLBERG'S CAR - STREET - NIGHT

Smallberg sits in his car, parked on a dark side street behind  
 the studio.

SMALLBERG  
 Arty. I'm fine. What about you?

MONEY (V.O.)  
 Fine fine fine! ...Where are you?

SMALLBERG  
...I'm at Home Depot.

INT. ELEVATOR - MOVING - NIGHT

Cliff is alone, deep in thought, going up in the elevator.  
But what we hear is Arty's affably goofy retort to Ben...

MONEY (V.O.)  
Well come on up here, have a drink,  
will ya? There's something I wanna  
talk to you about.

INT. SMALLBERG'S CAR - NIGHT

Smallberg lingers, preening in the silence. Finally...

SMALLBERG (V.O.)  
...Alright. I'm on my way.

He folds phone, looks up at the beacon of light that is Arty's  
top floor office. He looks at watch, sits back and waits.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Arty nods happily at Manny.

MONEY  
On his way.

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Cliff, in voyage cerebrum, sums up his thoughts, steps to  
the doors as they open.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cliff strides down the hall to Linda's apartment. He knocks  
on the door.

INT. LINDA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Linda opens the door to reveal Cliff standing there. There's  
a ruefulness about him. And fatigue. He takes the video  
tape out of his satchel and gives it to her.

LINDA  
Come in.

He steps inside, follows her into her living room.

INT. LINDA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

They sit across from each other.

CLIFF  
...So how'd you feel about that?

LINDA

...Do you want a juice or something?

He nods. She gets up, walks out.

INT. SMALLBERG'S CAR - NIGHT

Smallberg gets out of his car and heads toward the studio.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Linda pours juice. Cliff saunters in.

LINDA

I don't know. He knew going in. He signed on. 'Not the end of the world.

CLIFF

Maybe for him. ...Licking his wounds is all he can do now, I guess. Confidence assassin, that's for sure.

She looks testingly at him.

LINDA

You know, I think the show is evil. And I don't think I can be a part of it any longer.

CLIFF

What?!

LINDA

...Just rehearsing for when I get some guts.

CLIFF

You're weird, you know that?

She takes both glasses with her as she leaves. He follows.

EXT. STUDIO - PRODUCTION OFFICES - NIGHT

Smallberg enters the main building. The night guard lets him through.

INT. LINDA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Linda enters ahead of Cliff, puts his drink on the table and sits. He picks up the juice, too restless to sit.

CLIFF

I don't know what I'm... 'Not sure what... Manny... now that guy gets on my nerves sometimes. Where'd you find him again?

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

We watch as Smallberg and Money meet and greet; Manny standing by with the appropriate smile.

But it's Linda and Cliff's conversation we hear...

LINDA (V.O.)

He was at MGM. Rita's brother used to work with him...

CLIFF (V.O.)

Yeah well he's... gettin' a little pushy. I mean he's persuasive... very convincing...

The three men laugh at something clever Manny says.

LINDA (V.O.)

Clever, fearless... scarily ambitious.

CLIFF (V.O.)

All of the above.

LINDA (V.O.)

Well, you're the boss...

INT. LINDA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Linda folds her arms and looks up at Cliff.

LINDA

Fire him.

All of a sudden he's Woody Allen.

CLIFF

'Thing of it is... show like this, breaking new ground, lot less precedent. He may be just the kind of guy you...

LINDA

Yeah. I get it, Cliff.

Beat. Cliff rises.

CLIFF

Yeah, well... I'm gonna go...

He walks to the door.

LINDA

I have a confession to make.

He stops. Turns to her.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Arty sits on the edge of his desk, over Smallberg and Manny. They're halfway into a cognac.

MONEY

We've had our differences. But you know I've got the greatest respect for you. ...The kid can't run the thing by himself. ...And I do! I feel like an idiot for just letting you go like that. And... Because... Well, the thing of it is... I need you, Ben. So will you help me?

Smallberg sips his cognac.

SMALLBERG

Art, you know when the chips were down I was always there. I'm not a pre-madonna, but Jesus Christ, I have feelings. When this thing happened, sure I was angry. But I know this business, and I know you. And I know that if there was a way you could have saved me the embarrassment, you would have. In fact, you tried. So I'm no longer angry. And if you need me, I'm there.

They stand, shake hands and embrace.

INT. LINDA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Linda stands looking out the window, fiddling with the frill on the curtain. Cliff sits on the arm of the couch waiting to hear what she has to say.

LINDA

...My reasons for doing the show were questionable. No, not questionable. Selfish. If it was anyone other than you, I would never have done it. And I'm ashamed.

CLIFF

Linda...

She turns to him.

LINDA

I'm serious. I think the idea of putting that segment on is barbaric. Hell, I knew it was wrong the minute you explained the concept of the show to me. You know, it used to be, posturing was a means to an end. Now it's an end in itself.

Cliff uneasily guzzles down the rest of his drink.

CLIFF

Maybe w... I'm making too much of  
it. ...We've got a hit show...

LINDA

But look at the gutter it came from.  
Your own depravity. 'Didn't even  
matter that it was success at the  
misfortune of others. Hard part for  
me is I know you well enough to know  
you wouldn't have thought of a show  
like this the way you were before.

CLIFF

Before what?

LINDA

Before you were corrupted.

CLIFF

What the hell are you talking about?

LINDA

When Love and Money was canceled. I  
watched you come in, the first day,  
green as clover. It wasn't just the  
show, it was your new affluent  
lifestyle was canceled. A lifestyle  
you inherited from a pitch. That  
single sentence uttered from your  
lips to a pair of very important  
ears -- approved and then canceled.  
And your confidence was disappearing  
with it. And you thought it was  
going to last forever.

CLIFF

I don't have to defend it. We've  
got an insanely successful show  
because we give them what they want.

LINDA

Oh yes, of all the things we could  
give them, we're giving them what  
they want. Tsch! A fifteen minute  
break. All of it, Stern to Limbaugh,  
"Cops" to tabloid news. From the  
lions in the coliseum all the way to  
Extreme Audition... a nice slice of  
cheesecake. Against the madness.  
...That's about as noble as we can  
make what we do, Cliff. It's pastries  
in lieu of open savagery, and we're  
the bakers.



Cliff sits, rubs his weary eyes... goes quiet in resigned reflection.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Manny lights Arty's cigar. Smallberg signs a contract.

MONEY

First thing we've got to do is figure out how to handle this law suit.

SMALLBERG

Don't worry about that. The first thing you've gotta do is get that stupid son-of-a-bitch off the show.

MONEY

Well, if he won't cooperate... work with you...

SMALLBERG

Yeah, you do that, I'll take care of the law suit.

Arty looks over at Manny. Looks at his watch.

MONEY

Let's get him the hell in here.

INT. LINDA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cliff and Linda are toe-to-toe, hashing it out.

LINDA

There's no 'making it better'! It stinks from the head!

CLIFF

That's ridiculous. What are we, stupid, we can't think of something better than insulting, humiliating and torturing people?

LINDA

We can, we just won't match the ratings. So essentially, no, we can't. Not from here we can't.

CLIFF

Of course we can. It's a matter of finding another idea. That's why...

His cell rings. He takes it...

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hello.

MONEY (V.O.)  
Treadwell. Get over here right away.  
They're going to sue!

Cliff and Linda look into each others eyes.

EXT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Cliff approaches from the hallway. He knocks on Arty's door.

MONEY (O.S.)  
Come.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Cliff enters, sees Manny sitting there with Arty.

MONEY  
Fine fuckin' mess now. They're gonna  
sue. So what do you have to say  
about that?

Cliff looks briefly at Manny before he starts for a chair,  
grappling for a response...

CLIFF  
Well I... It's not like it's  
something we hadn't considered.

MONEY  
Whaddya mean 'we'? I considered it.  
Shit! This bastard couldn't even  
wait till morning. Anyway, I'm  
exercising my option.

CLIFF  
...Ok. I'm willing to stipulate  
that 'hairly' could be a law suit.

MANNY  
We're in an unenviable posture here  
we need to get out of.

MONEY  
'Unenviable' is selling the damn  
thing, for Chrissake!

CLIFF  
Uh, excuse me, but what the hell is  
he doing here?

MONEY  
I asked him here.

CLIFF  
Yeah, well, you didn't give him carte  
blanche to give me what for, did ya?  
(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Especially in light of the fact that less than 7 hours ago he was explaining to all of us how it didn't matter in the least what the contestant did, we were going to get our nut. Oh, Arty. Please tell me he's not the exercise of your option.

Beat. Then a voice...

SMALLBERG (O.S.)

No, Clifford. That would be me.

Cliff starts. Looks around at every possible crevice Smallberg could be hiding in. Smallberg bodies forth from Arty's study with a glint in his eye.

CLIFF

You gotta be kidding me. Hiding in the shadows, too! What is it, Benny, is leeching just a natural instinct with you? Oh, I know! You're trying to set new standards in the industry; most successful producer without a decent idea of his own in 8 years?

SMALLBERG

Just trying to mop up your mess.

MONEY

Ok ok. Now as per the contract, I have the right to assign a producer. I've chosen Ben here. I know you two have had issues in the past. We're just going to have to get past that now and move forward.

CLIFF

It wouldn't be forward we'd be moving, Arty. I can't work with this guy.

MONEY

He's who I've chosen. That's it.

CLIFF

How can you do this to me?

MONEY

We're in a tight spot here, Clifford!

CLIFF

I can't work with him, Arty. Don't ask me to.

MONEY

If you absolutely can't work with him, then I won't ask you to.

Arty's meaning registers on Cliff's face in the hard silence.

CLIFF  
...You're kidding me?!

SMALLBERG  
I don't see anybody laughing.

Cliff walks over and slugs Smallberg flush in the jaw. Knocks him down. Maybe out. He turns, looks at Arty.

MONEY  
That was uncalled for!

CLIFF  
Is everyone in this town a piece of work? Shame on you, Arty.

Cliff starts toward the door.

MONEY  
No, uhn uhn! No guilt here, Treadwell. You're not going to extend your 'blamemanship' to me for this. This is your mess! The position remains open for you, do you understand? Co-produce. Same deal as 'Love or Money'.

Cliff turns to him, a dead-to-rights frown.

CLIFF  
It's Love 'and' Money, Arty.

SMALLBERG  
(stirring)  
It was.

MONEY  
Whatever.

Cliff exits. Manny helps Smallberg to his feet.

INT. CLIFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Wendy lies in bed propped up on pillows. She has a mud mask on and watches a tape of herself on the show. She hears Cliff coming in the front door. She turns the tape off and puts on a movie channel. Cliff enters. He looks at her in a different way than we've seen, as if trying to solve her.

WENDY  
So they decided to go with the segment?

CLIFF  
Yeah.

WENDY

It's all good. I saw the tape. I mean he just looks like a loser who can't deal with the fact he lost. Which is pretty much the story anyway.

CLIFF

He's gonna sue.

WENDY

Let him. He'll lose, and it'll make him look even worse.

CLIFF

Well, I don't know if it's such a great idea anymore. Too late now.

WENDY

What do you mean, 'you don't know'? The fucking hick signed a contract. It's his ass 'he doesn't honor it. Why should he be any different than anyone else? And if he's allowed to do it, then why not anyone else? If we just stand by and let him do whatever, he could ruin everything we've struggled to accomplish. He needs to go down. Don't be such a wuss.

CLIFF

I'm not a wuss just 'cause I changed my mind! You know, it's human to have doubts from time to...

WENDY

Yeah well forget about that right now and just be right for a change!  
It's a fucking hit! Don't be crazy?!

He turns, looks her in the eye.

CLIFF

I got fired.

WENDY

Tsch! Yeah right.

CLIFF

No. I'm serious.

She looks at him, waiting for him to tell her he's kidding. But he just stares at her. Her eyebrows rise in disbelief, lips coiling in anger...

WENDY

How...?

(MORE)

WENDY (CONT'D)

How the hell do you manage to get fired from a show you're in charge of?! You STUPID motherfucker!

CLIFF

Look, baby, right now all I w...

WENDY

Don't 'baby' me. Tell me what happened.

CLIFF

I just did! Arty fired me.

WENDY

What about me? Am I fired too? Who's running the show?

CLIFF

You're not gonna believe it.

WENDY

Who's running the fucking show?!

CLIFF

Ben.

WENDY

Ahhh! You are such a loser!

CLIFF

Look...!

WENDY

No, you look! Whatever the fuck you did, you go back there and fix it. I don't care what you have to do, just go get your fuckin' job back!

CLIFF

I can't get it back!

WENDY

Well then you go beg Arty to let you back on the show as co-producer, assistant producer... something! That is, if you want to be with me.

He hangs his head a long beat. Looks at clock.

CLIFF

...'Go in in the morning.

He takes his pants off, sits on bed. He picks up remote.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

'Watching this?

She frowns, shakes 'no'. He flips around. Finds wrestling. Sits back and starts to watch.

WENDY

Why do you watch that crap? Don't you know it's fake?

He looks shocked, and suddenly very disappointed, like he'd never even considered the possibility.

INT. BOBBY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Lona stands by the counter with the phone to her ear. Bobby sits at the table eating hot dogs.

LONA

(into phone)

This is Lona Loganberry calling for Bobby Brooks, again. Mr. Fitch, would you please call me back? This is about the fifth time I've left a message, and we really would like to talk to you. Thank you.

She hangs up, sits at table.

BOBBY BROOKS

Well, he's got a lot of important business, bein' a lawyer 'n all. We shouldn't worry too much, Aw reckon.

INT. SMALLBERG'S OFFICE - DAY

Smallberg is in his plush new office with Fitch, who seems uncustomarily nervous, and Manny, cool as cucumber.

FITCH

He did tell him to stop!

MANNY

No, he didn't. He said 'quit'.

FITCH

Oh please...

SMALLBERG

No, not 'Oh please'. The contract clearly stipulates the contestant must use the word 'stop', and that any other reference used is incorrect and shall not be acknowledged. It's right there in black and white.

MANNY

The stipulation was put in to prevent any confusion that may have arisen from contestants or parties of another

(MORE)

MANNY (CONT'D)

language. Each contestant was clearly instructed on that point.

SMALLBERG

Now we'll give the fucker 25 grand. Any more than that and he eats it.

Fitch mulls it over.

FITCH (V.O.)

Yeah, hello, Mr. Brooks, Leon Fitch here. I wanted to get back to you on your case, uh... know you've been trying to reach me... been just swamped and I apologize. Anyway, now you're not there. Ha ha! Ok give me a call at your earliest convenience.

INT. STUDIO CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The seating arrangements say it all. Smallberg at the head of the oblong table, Arty at the other end. Manny's next to Smallberg. Cliff sits somewhere in the middle with Linda, Sylvia, and a few young MBA's, 3 MALE, 1 FEMALE, newly onboard. There is a kind of normalcy to it all; change happens fast in Hollywood. Cliff's shame is all swallowed but the tail.

MONEY

Ok, lemme, wait a minute... You're saying that you're gonna... the 'best course of action' is to counter sue on the grounds that he still... Cheney wasn't finished, and Brooks should pay damages to the network for...

Smallberg glances at Cliff a flicker before...

SMALLBERG

No, I'm saying we could. But we're not going to because we're benevolent people here.

(laughter)

We'll give him a little bundle out of human decency. More than it's worth, but never mind. We move on. ...Other business?

FITCH (V.O.)

...wasn't known until the very last minute, Bobby, what was going to happen. Called you as soon as I found out but I've missed you again.



## INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby's just come in from work. Bottle of Miller in hand, he listens to continuation of Fitch's conversation, which is now a message on his answering machine...

FITCH (V.O.)

Listen, they offered 25 thousand and they toned down the segment big time. I mean, doesn't look any different than any of the other... So, I took the offer, Bobby, I mean they're going on air with it in less than... what time is it... And like I said... toned down, big time version... I don't even think they showed... Anyway, all-in-all I think we made out ok. Alright. Call me anytime, buddy. Bye bye now.

Bobby picks up the phone in a kind of trance, dials...

BOBBY BROOKS

(into phone)

Honey. Bad news, baby. ...Yup.  
No, maybe... Why don't ye just...  
Come over here, ok?

## EXT. STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

Lona hurries out the door toward her car as she takes off the vest of her uniform.

CLIFF (V.O.)

Yeah, ok, fine. Only...

## INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Money, Smallberg and Manny peer at Cliff in the pregnant silence.

MONEY

Only what, Cliff?

CLIFF

Well, won't it look a little... petty, quibbling over a word? Quit, stop...

## INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby tosses back his beer, looks forlornly at the tv. His hang-dog expression belies the intense interest in his eyes as he watches Extreme on the set.

MONEY (V.O.)

No.

(MORE)

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

What looks petty is this big girly-man redneck all upset that he got a couple of smacks when 8 women have already taken it and moved on.

Bobby, red with fear and loathing, moves forward to the edge of his seat as on the set, Grimsby appears, introduces him.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

Lona, stuck in traffic, looks at her watch.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby watches himself on the set in horror. That first inebriated BOO is heard, and Bobby rises to his feet. He paces to-and-fro in front of the set, repulsed yet unable to look away as the others begin to pile on.

Lelio. And the house rings out of all proportion with BOOS and HISSES. Bobby's tearing at his hair.

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The four men sit silent. Smallberg leans back in his chair.

SMALLBERG

...So we go on as if nothing happened.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

Traffic starts to move. Lona takes her exit and speeds toward the outskirts of town.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby stands facing the set, watching as Grimsby declares...

GRIMSBY

(on tv)

It's your turn, my friend.

He leads Bobby toward the dungeon.

BOBBY BROOKS

Noooooo!!! He said they wouldn't...

Bobby paces again, rubbing his head crazily like to put out fire. We hear the torture starting on the set. Bobby disappears into the bathroom.

On the set, Cheney starts in on Bobby. Bobby starts to complain, and tugs on his chains. Cheney steps it up.

Move to reveal the open bathroom doorway, and Bobby's shadow as he moves frantically, aimlessly about. We can hear him WHINING like a scared dog.

INT. LONA'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Lona swerves through traffic almost colliding with a van.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

On the tv set, Cheney is deep into his flow on Bobby.

His final blow to Bobby's back is met with the sound of a GUNSHOT going off in the bathroom. And as the show plays...

EXT. BOBBY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lona pulls up, parks and goes running into the house.

BOBBY BROOKS (V.O.)  
Quit! ...Aaaaaaaaah! ...Git awf  
mie! You see what he de-id?

After a time, we hear Lona scream.

LONA  
Aaahhhh!!! Aaaahhh!!  
Aaaaaaaaahhhh!!

GRIMSBY (V.O.)  
I think we'll deduct the cost of  
damage to the wall out of his...  
severance package.

BLACKOUT

We hear a local Alabama radio ditty, and now the ANNOUNCER comes in with the news.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
(southern accent)  
This just in... We've just been  
informed that there's been a death...  
the death of a man in his home in  
the southwest suburb of...

FADE UP ON:

EXT. BOBBY'S HOUSE - DAY

Lona's car, still parked up on the sidewalk. E.M.S. and police vehicles are sprawled along the street.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
Details are sketchy, but it is  
believed to have been a suicide.  
...Ok, we're getting word that the  
man killed was a local celebrity who  
is believed to have appeared on the  
popular tv show Extreme Audition.

INT. BOBBY'S BATHROOM - DAY

E.M.S. crew are placing Bobby's dead body on a gurney. POLICE standing by. Lona, wasted, watching her Bobby being carried away, starts to whine...

LONA

Aha ha ha baby... ! Aha ha ha... !

She starts to reach for him. An officer holds her back. He holds her up now as she falls... breaks down in his arms. Bobby's body disappears as the gurney is carried out.

INT. CULVER CITY OFFICES - HALLWAY - DAY

Linda arrives at Manny's office door with some papers. She's about to knock on the door when she hears...

FITCH (O.S.)

No! I want to talk to him!

MANNY (O.S.)

He's not here. How many fuckin' times have I gotta tell you?

INT. MANNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Manny, in his newly acquired office, is trying to quiet an angry, nervous Fitch who paces and chatters.

FITCH

Well where the hell is he? Why can't I talk to him? This is bullshit!

MANNY

Lower your voice in here, Leon. He'll be here later this morning. You need to calm down...

FITCH

She knows. 'Knew right where to come to get her best bet. Forget me. Shit. It gets out you guys rigged it and he brought them to me... him running the show now, how's that gonna look?

MANNY

'Not gonna look anything. We're not liable for...

FITCH

I'm the lawyer! Remember? He's dead! What do you suppose they're gonna think killed him?!

MANNY

I swear to god, you raise your voice  
in here again, I'll call security!  
Now siddown!

INT. HALLWAY - MANNY'S OFFICE DOOR - DAY

Linda, agog, brow knit trying to wrap her brain around it,  
starts away slowly. Her pace quickens as reality sinks in.

INT. MANNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Manny gives Leon a glass of water.

MANNY

Now, what is it you want, exactly?

Fitch looks up at him.

FITCH

This thing's bigger. Much bigger  
now. I want more. Much more.

MANNY

Well, like I said Ben will be here...

FITCH

(rising)

No. I'm going back to my office.  
I've got work to do. You tell him,  
if I don't hear from him by 2, we go  
our separate ways.

Fitch exits.

INT. LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Linda enters. She hurries to her desk, flips on her computer  
monitor and searches the internet for...

CUT TO

FULL SCREEN VIEW OF COMPUTER MONITOR ...Bobby Brooks -- News --  
'Local singer Bobby Brooks, one of the most recent contestants  
on Extreme Audition, believed to have committed suicide.

CUT TO

Linda, wide-eyed as the magnitude of the 'set up' suffocates  
her reason. She picks up her phone, presses speed dial.

LINDA

(into phone)

...Cliff. We need to talk. ...No,  
not over the phone. Come to my  
office, right away.

INT. 1ST FLOOR LOBBY - DAY

Smallberg enters the building, nods to the security desk and steps to the elevators.

INT. 8TH FLOOR LOBBY - DAY

Smallberg comes out of the elevator, starts toward his office. Cliff passes him on his way to see Linda. It's awkward. They resolve to raise eyebrows alone as acknowledgment, continuing on their way.

INT. HALLWAY - LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens. Inside we see Linda, sitting on her desk watching as Cliff, smoldering with rage, comes storming out of her office and down the hall. He's on his cellphone, talking to...

CLIFF  
(into phone)  
Miss Loganberry, I'll get back to  
you. I promise. Thank you.

He puts phone away continuing his march through hall to...

EXT. SMALLBERG'S OFFICE - DAY

Smallberg's door. Cliff bangs on it. Doesn't wait, bursts in... sees Smallberg at his desk.

SMALLBERG  
What the hell...?

Cliff runs at him, jumps over his desk and starts pounding on him. Smallberg slugs back as they roll off the desk onto the floor.

CLIFF  
I'll kill ya, you son-of-a-bitch!

Cliff quickly has the upper hand. He grabs Smallberg by the neck and pounds his head into the carpeted floor. Bang bang bang like Bam Bam. Fight's all but over. But Cliff's lost his normal. He looks like a punisher, little demented, no longer struggling with the weight of his troubles, but introducing Smallberg's head to the floor. Smallberg's checking out.

Over Cliff's shoulder, Linda, running to him. She kneels, grabs him at the shoulders.

LINDA  
Cliff! You're going to kill him!

He is. And the sound of her voice... somehow gets through. He unclasps his hands from Smallberg's neck and stares at them. He wipes the blood from them and springs to his feet.

Stands over Smallberg who squirms in pain.

CLIFF  
Call the police.

EXT. BRENTWOOD BUILDING - DAY - LATER

Police cuff Smallberg, load him into a unit and drive off.

EXT./INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - ANOTHER DAY

Through the pane of Arty's office window, we see Arty, sullen, with Cliff, who consoles him.

CLIFF (V.O.)  
You know what's wrong, don't you?  
You know what's happened. Don't  
you? What we've done?

INT. ARTHUR MONEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cliff signs a new contract. And Arty, with a handshake, appears to be giving the reins of what's left of a show back to Cliff. Move to reveal Cliff's face, the eyes, and the newly found wisdom there.

CLIFF (V.O.)  
...We've run the genre ragged.  
Explored it to its limits. There's  
nowhere else to go with it.

A MONTAGE

...Cliff, at home with Wendy, fighting. She points at things and yells at him.

CLIFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Unless we started killing people.  
And that's against the law.

He stands slowly, raises his arm and points to the front door mouthing his edict for Wendy to leave.

CLIFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
So, the question is... What do we  
do now? How do we follow it?

EXT./INT. APARTMENT BLDG. - NIGHT

Through the windows of this 20 story apartment building, we see many people in their living rooms with their tv sets on. Many are tuned to the station where we see Cliff, alone on the screen, addressing them.

The air is still; the silence like a pre-war presidential speech to a captive audience listening to hear what will become of Extreme Audition.

CLIFF (V.O.)  
I did a lot of thinking. And after  
I was all done, thinking it every  
way I could think of, I still didn't  
have a clue. Then, all of a sudden,  
it came.

A MONTAGE

...Cliff, having lunch with Linda. Calm, relaxed. Happy.

CLIFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
The idea is... each week we'll send  
a television crew into the city.  
We're going to talk to people.

...Cliff, in studio, getting his new show on the boards from  
the ground up again, with Linda.

CLIFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
And what we'll talk about... or rather  
what the contestants will talk about,  
is ideas.

...programming the show. Outside doing the show; interviewing  
people in a fast gathering crowd.

CLIFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Anyone will be allowed to participate.  
They'll share with us, the Greatest  
Ideas crew, ideas which they feel  
will benefit mankind. 'Cause I'm  
just crazy like that. ...The one  
whose idea benefits the greatest  
number of people will win a million  
dollars that week, with a chance for  
the grand prize of Ten Million Dollars  
at the end of the season!

...the shows participants, in the studio, being given the  
supplies they need.

CLIFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Other ideas which help neighborhoods,  
communities, cities, will also win  
cash and prizes.

...a robot prepares an entire meal, soup to nuts.

CLIFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But the emphasis will be on helping  
people.

...Cliff, meeting with Lona at Bobby's wake.



CLIFF (CONT'D)

Ideas will instantly be voted on by the tv audience and a panel of experts in a sort of straining process. 5 ideas to a player.

...the studio audience watching an invention trim hedges on a monitor above the INVENTOR and HOST.

...A section of stage where a PARTICIPANT indicates with pointer on large display pad various aspects of his plan on how to control weather.

...OTHER PARTICIPANTS on the stage; a giant rotating disk with tools, charts, graphs, bunsen burners. A new age mall of creme-de-la-creme ideas being forged into action.

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

Each idea will be elaborated on in the process. One main idea will be chosen at the end of every show. Who knows, maybe one day...

...Cliff, a thought bubble appears above his head of...

A PARTICIPANT with chef's hat, holding up his creation of...

PARTICIPANT

...a new food, made of inexpensive natural products that is easily produced, ready for consumption, and will feed millions for pennies. They smell and taste like donuts, but one serving is ten times the nutritional value of brown rice and contains the benefits of three daily helpings of fruits and vegetables.'

CLIFF (V.O.)

As I said, the winner gets one million...

...Cliff, making love to Linda.

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

And will, of course, enjoy the satisfaction of having served mankind. ...2nd place 100 grand, 3rd place 50 grand, and 4th place 25 grand.

...A NASCAR team stands with a 14 YEAR OLD BOY who holds up a bottle of his green sludge before it's poured into the team car's engine.

REPORTER (V.O.)

How do you account for the shows very respectable ratings?

(MORE)

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

Not quite as high as Extreme, but  
then, nothing at all to be ashamed  
of.

CLIFF (V.O.)

The show's numbers are better than  
the lottery, as everyone has at least  
one good idea, and therefore, better  
odds.

...We see the studio audience on a given night. Engaged.  
Inquisitive. A lot more sane looking.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Bright sunny day. People bustling about. The city's alive.

CLIFF (V.O.)

They're still with us. Ahead of us.  
Waiting. Asking for more. And less.  
Cause less is more. We owe it to  
them to try harder. You know, like  
they do in the movies. And that's  
exactly what we're gonna do.

The Greatest Idea's crew approaches a passerby.

The End