

LEFT COAST

PILOT

Written by:

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OVER BLACK:

"This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl."

-The Crying of Lot 49, Thomas Pynchon

FADE IN:

BEGIN MONTAGE:

A SUSHI CHEF expertly prepares a California Roll.

Dodger Stadium. SRO.

A busy Hollywood street. A Toyota navigates traffic. The DRIVER, completely unaware that...

... a skateboarder, hunched down, is holding onto the rear bumper, secretly catching a ride.

END MONTAGE.

SUPER TITLE: **LEFT COAST**

INT. RECEPTION AREA - CHUCK ASHBURN'S OFFICE - SAME

Stark white, matching furniture. A beautiful RECEPTIONIST with a pneumatic figure and British accent, sits behind a large white desk.

Seated at the far end of the reception area:

BRYAN DIAZ: early 30s, intelligent, neurotic, wound too tightly for his own good -- sits in an overstuffed chair -- nervously drums his fingers on the armrest.

RECEPTIONIST
Mister Ashburn will see you now.
(under her breath)
Not that it'll matter...

INT. LEE ASHBURN'S OFFICE - SAME

A large office, white, clinical. At one end is a massive desk - but what immediately catches our eye is:

A startling sculpture - 'The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living': A dissected dead shark, each section in a separate transparent casing.

It's positioned so that looks like the shark is about to devour the person sitting in the chair opposite the desk, a ham-fisted (but effective) attempt at intimidation.

LEE ASHBURN, late 40s, tanned, casually dressed, rises from behind his desk and walks towards a sidebar:

ASHBURN
You want a drink?

Early morning sunshine is pouring through the windows:

BRYAN
A little early for me.

ASHBURN
Suit yourself.

ASHBURN moves to the sidebar and begins to fix himself a martini, but BRYAN can't tear his eyes away from the menacing sculpture.

ASHBURN (CONT'D)
(calling over his
shoulder)
About to loan it to MoCA.

BRYAN
(trying to be polite)
It certainly is... interesting...

ASHBURN
Have a seat.

As ASHBURN, back turned, continues to mix his drink, BRYAN sits down. He's overcome with a strange unease and turns around only to find: The open maw of the shark - looking like it is to devour him at any moment.

The shark is dead, but it's still deeply unsettling.

ASHBURN (CONT'D)
(calling over his
shoulder)
You from SoCal?

BRYAN
(as he stares into the
mouth of the shark)
Uh, actually, I'm from Indiana.

ASHBURN
(Dismissively)
Hoosiers, Footloose, got it.

BRYAN stutters to answer as he tries to turn his attention away from the gaping maw of the shark looming behind him.

BRYAN
I've been writing theater in New
York for the last three years.

ASHBURN turns to face him. BRYAN hurriedly hides the piece behind his back. ASHBURN doesn't notice.

ASHBURN
New York, huh? Coming here, must've
been some serious culture shock.

Before BRYAN can answer, ASHBURN'S turned back to mixing his drink (and his inexorable slide into full-blown alcoholism).

ASHBURN (CONT'D)
New York. Not a fan. Went to the
Met Gala last year with one of the
Kardavoukian girls...

He waits for BRYAN to be impressed. When he doesn't get the desired response:

ASHBURN (CONT'D)
... great party, but New York, I
don't see what all the fuss is
about... had anything produced?

BRYAN manages to tear his attention away from the shark for a moment.

BRYAN
I'm sorry, say that again.

ASHBURN finishes mixing his drink and starts to turn back to BRYAN.

ASHBURN
I said, have you had anything
produced?

BRYAN
Oh, yes, a one act. Off Broadway.
Ran for four months.

ASHBURN
(dismissively)
I meant here.

BRYAN
No, not yet.

It's clear that ASHBURN is already tuning him out.

ASHBURN
Okay, so, what's your idea?

BRYAN clears his throat nervously.

BRYAN
It's called "Central Avenue"...

ASHBURN
(interrupts)
An adaptation of? Superhero? Comic book? Re-make? Podcast? Tell me it's at least an existing I.P.

BRYAN
(shakes his head)
Uhhh, no, it's an original idea.

At that, ASHBURN crosses his arms. Despite his negative body language, BRYAN soldiers on.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
I made some notes.

BRYAN reaches into his jacket pocket to pull out a group of notecards. He's so nervous that he tugs too hard and they snag on the jacket lining. With a loud RIP, BRYAN manages to free the cards, sending them scattering across the floor in the process.

BRYAN scrambles after them then, recovering some semblance of dignity, shuffles them into order and begins to read.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
Nineteen fifty. A young, beautiful, up and coming singer, Mary Ellen, makes her way through the backstage of the Downbeat club... she greets her friend, Theresa, then, suddenly...

BRYAN turns to the next index card.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
...they begin to kiss, tentatively at first, then with increasing passion...

ASHBURN
(interrupts)
Hold on... you're pitching me a gay period piece? About jazz?!

BRYAN looks at ASHBURN perplexed, then back at his notes.

BRYAN

(flustered)

I mixed up the order... they're not gay.

ASHBURN

But they're kissing...doesn't that make them gay? Or are they bi, what's the phrase?

(suddenly remembering)

LGBT, what's the last letter?

(a beat - then triumphant)

Q! That's it. So these two are 'lesbians'?

BRYAN

No, no lesbians, no fluidity. They don't kiss.

ASHBURN

They don't kiss, but they want to, is that it? Or the older more established singer uses her sexuality to manipulate the younger singer...

(thinking out loud)

You know Universal is doing a remake of "Showgirls"...if you could turn this into that, you might have something.

BRYAN

(growing more flustered)

No, no, they don't like each other.

ASHBURN

You just said they were best friends.

BRYAN

They are, it's just that, you see, there's a man and...

ASHBURN

(rubbing his hands together)

Oh, I got it, it's a menage a trois, some hot threesome action.

BRYAN

No, it's just the two of them.

ASHBURN
The two lesbians.

BRYAN
Maybe I should start again.

ASHBURN frowns, crosses his arms again.

EXT. DHARMA CAFE - LOS FELIZ - LATER

Sunny. Temperate. The outdoor courtyard. A visibly deflated BRYAN, sits at a table across from his girlfriend MELISSA: late 20s, sharp, girl next door good looks and a sympathetic expression on her face.

BRYAN
It was a complete disaster.
(beat - almost dreamily)
In the right hands...it could be another "In The Mood For Love", or "Casablanca"... I mean it could be something truly incredible... something transcendent.
(beat)
If I could make this, the way it should be made, even if it meant I never got anything else made... it'd be worth it.

She reaches across the table, and lays her hand gently, reassuringly on his.

MELISSA
I know you don't want to hear this, but that could've gone worse. When I auditioned for Ashburn, he insisted I read topless. I have no idea how he hasn't been 'Me Too'ed' yet.

BRYAN
Sucks. Sorry babe. He's an asshole.
(beat)
It's my fault though, not one of my finer performances.

She makes a point of looking him over:

MELISSA
You need to loosen up a bit.

BRYAN
I am loose.

MELISSA

No, babe, next to you Mike Pence is loose. When I first met you, you were so much happier, more relaxed. What happened?

BRYAN

Failure. Lots and lots of failure.

MELISSA

You should check out that Youtube guy, might help you get your head right. Then again, maybe all of this is a lost cause...

MELISSA looks around, at the increased number of HOMELESS on sidewalks lined with garbage. As she surveys the urban blight around them:

MELISSA (CONT'D)

L.A.'s changed since we got here... I don't know how to put it into words, but there's a really dark vibe at work here.

A beat while she considers, before offering:

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Maybe we should think about moving back. We've been out here for three years, and you're incredibly talented, but your writing hasn't taken off, and neither has my acting.

She hesitates, reluctant to broach the next subject:

MELISSA (CONT'D)

I talked to my Dad this weekend, he said if we move back, he can get you a job at the dealership.

(beat)

For what we pay in rent here, we could have a real house, with a yard... I could have a little garden...

BRYAN looks at MELISSA as if she's taken leave of her senses:

BRYAN

Selling Lexuses, Backyard BBQ's,
 "Gee Bryan, that was some Klan
 rally last night, say...how'd you
 get rid of that crabgrass?", golf
 at your Dad's country club... which
 is still 'whites only' I might add.
 (beat)

You think L.A. has a 'dark vibe'?
 You should take a look at what's
 lurking just beneath the surface of
 an Indianapolis suburb.

MELISSA

Bryan, you're from a neighborhood
 like that.

Then summoning a resoluteness he didn't display in his
 pitches:

BRYAN

People come to L.A. to make their
 dreams come true. People in
 Indiana, abandoned their dreams so
 they could mow their yards and play
 golf. Not to mention that you don't
 know what it's like being a brown
 person in Indiana. Everyone
 treating you like some kind of
 exotic zoo animal, or dangerous
 criminal. Fuck that place.
 (beat)

I'm not going back. Ever.

Before MELISSA can respond, the SERVER calls out an order:

SERVER (O.S.)

I've got Bodhisattva Beignets, and
 Eightfold Espressos for Melissa.

MELISSA

Be right back.

She leaves for the counter. As BRYAN sits alone -- a
 bedraggled MAN, long hair, balding on top, a voluminous salt
 and pepper beard, strangely clean bare feet, could easily be
 mistaken for someone unhoused (or Rick Rubin) -- shuffles
 over to him.

MAN

Rough day, huh?

The MAN sees BRYAN'S reticence, extends his hand.

WALTER
Name's Walter.

BRYAN shakes.

BRYAN
Bryan. Had a meeting this morning.
Didn't go well.

WALTER'S tone is warm, soothing, like a friendly P.S.A.:

WALTER
Bryan, did you know that almost
three hundred people die in traffic
accidents in L.A., every year?

Despite, reciting this grim statistic, WALTER remains upbeat.

BRYAN
No. I didn't, I...

Before he can continue, WALTER cuts him off:

WALTER
A lot of angry people, behind the
wheel of death machines.
(beat)
That's why I don't drive.
(beat)
You never know what crazy shit
these streets have in store for
you.

With that, WALTER shuffles off.

BRYAN
Good talk.

MELISSA returns with two takeout bags.

MELISSA
Who was that?

BRYAN still processing the strange encounter.

BRYAN
Uh, that was Walter.

EXT. OLYMPIC BLVD. - LATER

BRYAN'S beat up Toyota Corolla sits in the middle lane of
crowded midday traffic.

INT. CAR - SAME

BRYAN, balancing his Beignet and coffee against the steering wheel, scans the traffic ahead of him; it's bumper to bumper (because isn't it always?). He glances nervously at the clock on the dashboard.

He looks up to find that traffic is finally moving again.

EXT. OLYMPIC BLVD. - SAME

The Toyota starts forward when another car -- covered from bumper to bumper with handmade signs -- attempts to make a right hand turn from the far left-hand lane, cutting him off -
- and nearly causes BRYAN to T-bone him.

INT. CAR - SAME

BRYAN slams on the brakes and his car SCREECHES to a stop, inches from the other car. BRYAN finds himself staring at a huge blown-up headshot of a man in his early 30's wearing a goofy smile. Beneath it, a hand painted sign reads: Leonard Rafferty, Actor Extraordinaire!!

BRYAN

What the...?!

EXT. OLYMPIC BLVD. - SAME

BRYAN steps out of the car. The air is filled with BLARING HORNS. He looks at the strange car: like a mobile billboard, plastered with posters and handmade signs for Leonard Rafferty.

LEONARD, Caucasian, late 20s, oozing unearned self-confidence, steps out, grinning goofily, just like his photo.

LEONARD

Whoa, that was close! You should be careful, you could've hit me!

BRYAN

(irate)

I should be careful?!! You made a righthand turn from the far left-hand lane! Not to mention the fact you didn't use your turn signal..

LEONARD

My what?

BRYAN

A lever on the steering column...
 (off LEONARD'S blank
 stare)
 ...you use it to indicate that
 you're changing lanes.

BRYAN sighs in frustration, then notices his clothes --
 there's a large stain on his crotch where his Beignet and
 espresso fell on him.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

I look like I just finished first
 at the L.A. Masturbation Marathon.

LEONARD

(genuinely curious)
 Is that a thing?

BRYAN

(looking back at his
 pants)
 No! Look at this!

LEONARD, blissfully unaware of BRYAN'S anger, shakes his head
 and 'TSKS' good-naturedly.

LEONARD

Whoa there, friend, you shouldn't
 eat and drive. It's not safe.

BRYAN

(disbelieving)
 Not safe?! Not safe?! This from
 the maniac who crossed two lanes of
 traffic to cut me off. I nearly hit
 you!!

LEONARD

(still grinning goofily)
 Hey, don't worry, I'm not even
 angry.

The chorus of HONKS grows even louder behind them.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Let's take this to the side of the
 road. We're holding up all these
 cars. And if there's one thing I've
 learned at traffic school over the
 years, you've got to be considerate
 to your fellow drivers.

EXT. IVAR AVE. - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DUSK

A seedy apartment building, just above Hollywood Blvd; sandwiched between the 101, and much nicer real estate a block North.

BRYAN stands at the mail boxes, sorting through his mail. He comes across a bright pink envelope from A & R Furniture Rental.

As he reads the 'Past Due Notice', his next door neighbor, ERRONEOUS MONK, known as 'ERRONEOUS' to his friends: a tie-dye sporting, unrepentant stoner, Jeffrey Lebowski is an overachiever by comparison -- ambles up.

ERRONEOUS

Whoa, dude... pink.. somebody forgot to pay their bill on time...don't worry it's the red ones you really need to worry about.

The next envelope BRYAN pulls out is bright red.

ERRONEOUS (CONT'D)

(noticing)

Bummer, dude. Uh, I was wondering if I could, like, borrow your laptop. I broke mine.

An angry look grows on BRYAN'S face.

BRYAN

Do you remember where you got your laptop?

ERRONEOUS navigates the fog that is his memory.

ERRONEOUS

I musta borrowed it from someone.

BRYAN

You borrowed it from me. That was my laptop you broke! That's why,
(beat)
I had to rent a new one...

He waves the Past Due bill at ERRONEOUS:

BRYAN (CONT'D)

That I can't even afford.

ERRONEOUS

Hey, man, I can completely dig where you're coming from. Laptops are crucial for writing. Just this morning, I got this kick ass opening for my screenplay.

BRYAN

I don't believe this.

ERRONEOUS

I know you always say I don't have a good enough... uh... what's the word?

BRYAN

Vocabulary.

ERRONEOUS

Yeah, vocabulary... to be a writer. But listen to this: "Exterior... beach... sunset... the horizon glows red like a sunset..."

BRYAN

You can't say "like a sunset" because it is a sunset.

ERRONEOUS

I don't get it. Isn't that the point?

BRYAN

No. You can't use a simile to describe, never mind.

Angrily, BRYAN stomps off towards his apartment. ERRONEOUS calls after him.

ERRONEOUS

Hey...so, like, can I borrow your laptop or not...?

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - DUSK

BRYAN enters. Sparsely furnished, stacks of cocktail table books on jazz, and historical L.A. He takes out his phone, notices he has a trio of voicemails. He hits 'Play':

MELISSA'S DAD

(gruff male voice)

Melissa tells me, you two are
thinking about leaving
"Hollyweird", coming back home.

(beat)

We'll get you started at the
dealership.

He envisions life back in Wisconsin:

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Elm Grove, Indiana: strip malls, sooo many F-150 pick-up
trucks, big box stores, fast food chains.

BRYAN, 40 lbs. heavier, in an ill-fitting suit, on the
dealership floor, hawking Lexuses.

Suburban Hell. Rows of identical houses, each displaying
American flags, Blue Lives Matter flags, freshly-cut lawns.
BRYAN, mowing his front yard, MELISSA gardening nearby.

BRYAN and MELISSA on the golf course with MELISSA'S DAD, and
a group of portly men, all sporting actual Klan hoods.

They're laughing hysterically. BRYAN SCREAMS.

END MONTAGE.

BRYAN hits 'Stop':

BRYAN

I've got to sell something... soon.

INT. GLOP YOGA STUDIO - NIGHT

Walls covered with posters advertising a lifestyle company:
Glop.

Two rows of yoga mats used by aspiring ACTRESSES, being
instructed by a YOGA TEACHER, mid 20s, fit, psychotically
cheerful - who is also, you guessed it, an aspiring actress.

MELISSA is among them, sweating profusely, as she moves into
downward dog.

The YOGA TEACHER gently massages her glutes:

YOGA TEACHER

That's right Melissa, keep exhaling
down, through your anus...

No double takes. Everyone just rolls with it.

INT. GLOP YOGA STUDIO - NIGHT

Class is over. MELISSA rolls up her mat. The YOGA TEACHER comes over to her mat. She looks MELISSA over, is dismayed by what she sees:

YOGA TEACHER
You need to hydrate, and just generally clean up your aura...

She hands MELISSA a bottle of water emblazoned with the Glop! logo.

YOGA TEACHER (CONT'D)
Don't you have an audition coming up?

With little enthusiasm:

MELISSA
Yeah, I guess, going to go home, maybe run lines with my boyfriend.

YOGA TEACHER
When you go into that audition, you need to radiate confidence and remember to breathe through your anus...that's the key.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

BRYAN lies on a well-worn couch, half paying attention to his laptop, absent-mindedly clicking on Youtube videos:

A music video 'club scene'. RITA QUICK, mid 20s, Caucasian, is going full blaxploitation (complete with Afro wig) -- doing a cover of "Gold Digger" (and setting race relations back a generation in the process):

RITA
"...Now, I ain't sayin' he a gold digger...when I'm need...but he ain't messin' with no broke...."

BRYAN clicks on another video before things get even more problematic:

CLOSE: A MASKED WOMAN, in a balaclava, speaking directly into the CAMERA. On the wall behind her, a flag emblazoned with the letters 'E.W.R.F.':

MASKED WOMAN

If you've stolen from us, you
should sleep with one eye open!

BRYAN clicks on the next video in the queue:

A TV series promo. The cast is comprised of nearly identical 'pneumatic' brunettes in oversized sunglasses, surgically swollen lips, each taking selfies by the pool -- over a droning techno soundtrack.

ANNOUNCER

(breathy, sexy)

Are you ready to 'Kick It' with the
Kardavoukians? Tuesdays at nine.
Soma TV.

Almost in complete disbelief at what he's just seen;

BRYAN

Why did they think I wanted to see
that?

BRYAN clicks on the next video the algorithm's served up:

LEONARD RAFFERTY, dressed in a tux against a tacky fake
sunset backdrop. It's an obviously self-made ad.

LEONARD

Looking for a romantic lead? How
about an action hero?

In a very rough jump cut the scene switches to show LEONARD,
decked out like a second-rate Rambo, standing in front of a
cheesy, hand-painted war scene.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

I'm Leonard Rafferty, actor
extraordinaire. No role is too
difficult for me. So, if you're
looking for the next Brad Pitt,
look no further.

A phone number begins to flash at the bottom of the screen.
LEONARD holds his mock heroic pose.

BRYAN

This is definitely the darkest
timeline.

The phone rings.

INT. BEDROOM - MELISSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (INTERCUT W/BRYAN)

MELISSA is pacing in front of her mirror, phone up to her ear, 'sides' in the other hand.

MELISSA

Hey babe. You want to come over and run lines with me? Then we could check out a movie, I think "Jaws" is at the New Beverly...

A beat, as BRYAN considers, before:

BRYAN

I've seen enough sharks today...

He realizes MELISSA wasn't at the ASHBURN meeting, wouldn't get the reference, and just pushes past it:

BRYAN (CONT'D)

...think I'm just going to stay in, try and figure out what to do next.

MELISSA

Hey, did you ever check out that career guru? I read about him on Glop!

BRYAN

Glop. Really?

MELISSA

Would a high-end lifestyle brand lie?

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

BRYAN pulls up the YouTube channel on his laptop: Tight on THIRD EYE THEO.

He's Black, bald, strikingly handsome, blissed out - no human being has ever been this relaxed. He smiles, his perfect white teeth are mesmerizing.

THIRD EYE THEO

Ever hear someone say 'California', then later someone else says 'Roll'?

BRYAN looks at the screen quizically.

THIRD EYE THEO (CONT'D)

That's no coincidence. The universe wants you to get a California Roll, because when you're sitting there, waiting for your order of sushi...something wonderful might happen.

(beat)

In this series of videos I'll teach how you to correctly interpret these signs...and in the process...

EXT. ZUMA BEACH - MORNING

The elderly SURFER riding the waves at dawn.

THIRD EYE THEO (V.O.)

...unlock the secrets of the universe.

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

BRYAN, bleary-eyed, sits, bowl of Fruit Loops in one hand, notepad in the other, watching the last THIRD EYE THEO video:

THIRD EYE THEO

So the things that you might write off as 'coincidence' are people, places and situations that have been deliberately placed in your path, to help get you where you need to go...

(beat)

..."See the world is full of things more powerful than us..."

BRYAN looks at his wall clock, realizes he's late, dashes out out the front door.

EXT. 405/10 INTERCHANGE - DAY

A vast, sprawling parking lot, that seems to overrun the Westside. Thousands of cars, virtually motionless in bumper to bumper traffic; accompanied by a cacophony of HORNS and the soft HUM of exhaust.

THIRD EYE THEO (V.O.)

...but if you know how to catch a ride, you can go places"...

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

A gleaming glass tower in Century City.

INT. STAUBER'S OFFICE - CONSOLIDATED PICTURES - SAME

Quiet. In stark contrast to the noise outside. It's sparsely, but precisely furnished. ROY STAUBER, producer, 50s, English, sits behind a large, futuristic desk, framed by movie posters on the wall behind him. Across from him, BRYAN is mid-pitch:

BRYAN

Los Angeles. Central Avenue. The golden age of West Coast jazz.

He's distracted, half-focused on the story, while also scanning the room for frightening shark sculptures. He doesn't find any, but the poster for the movie "Grievous Bodily Harm" catches his eye.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Central Avenue was a vibrant, culturally significant African American community, a West Coast Harlem, and it's against this backdrop we tell this story, of...

Before he can continue, the RECEPTIONIST enters, wearing a frightened, sheepish expression.

RECEPTIONIST

(stammering)

Uh, uh, sir, there's...

She's gently moved aside by a TRIO of FEMALE MASKED INTRUDERS, in a army jackets, their faces covered by balaclavas, each leveling an assault weapon at STAUBER.

Instead of being afraid (like a normal person), STAUBER becomes even more agitated and indignant.

STAUBER

What's the meaning of this? Who are you? Do you know who I am?

MASKED INTRUDER #3

You're a capitalist pig! And we're members of the Ecumenical Writers Restitution Front!

STAUBER

The Ecumenical Writers Restitution Front?

(MORE)

STAUBER (CONT'D)
Doesn't exactly roll off the
tongue, you might want to do
another pass on the name.

The snark only enrages the MASKED INTRUDERS further.

MASKED INTRUDER #1
Did we ask for notes?!
(beat)
You owe your writers a percentage
of the back-end from "Grievous
Bodily Harm".

MASKED INTRUDER #1 presses the barrel against STAUBER'S
temple for emphasis.

MASKED INTRUDER #1 (CONT'D)
Which is what we're going to
inflict, if you don't pay up.

STAUBER, completely nonplussed:

STAUBER
They can't share in 'profit
participation', if there's no
profit.

MASKED INTRUDER #2
It made three hundred million
dollars! Sounds like the movie was
pretty damn profitable.

Finishing her comrade's thought:

MASKED INTRUDER #1
Don't they use math in the God Save
the Queen, wrong side of the road
driving, warm beer drinking, Lord
of the Rings village you're from?

Unfazed by the insult:

STAUBER
I can show you the studio's
accounting.

The MASKED INTRUDERS suddenly notice BRYAN'S presence. They
point their weapons at him. He puts his hands in the air.

MASKED INTRUDER #2
You from the studio? You the
accountant?

BRYAN
 (nervously)
 I, I'm, a writer, pitching a story.

They momentarily lower their guns, but BRYAN keeps his hands up.

MASKED INTRUDER #2
 Oh yeah? What's it called?

BRYAN
 "Central Avenue". It takes place in a famous jazz club, it's about two singers in love with the same man...

Fearful, the INTRUDERS are going to try and steal the idea:

STAUBER
 Are you trying to hijack the pitch too?

MASKED INTRUDER #1
 (tersely)
 Don't interrupt. Don't they teach you manners in The Shire?

BRYAN
 It's a story about love, jealousy, and music.

MASKED INTRUDER #3
 It sounds wonderful.

The three MASKED INTRUDERS silently confer.

MASKED INTRUDER #1
 (to BRYAN)
 You can go.
 (re: STAUBER)
 Don't let these bastards grind you down.

BRYAN nods at the advice, then bolts from his chair.

INT. HALLWAY - CONSOLIDATED PICTURES - CONTINUOUS

As BRYAN walks briskly down the hall, he hears GUNSHOTS ring out in the office behind him. He picks up the pace, as he walks/runs - he fishes out his phone and hits the speed dial:

BRYAN
(scared, flustered)
I'd like to report uh, a... hostage
type situation...

EXT. CENTURY PARK EAST - DAY

After safely reaching the street, BRYAN makes another call.

BRYAN
(into phone)
This is Bryan Diaz... I need to
make an appointment with Cameron
Butler. Today. Now.

Behind him, glass SHATTERS, followed by the sound of tires
SCREECHING (o.s.).

EXT. WILSHIRE - CONTINUOUS

Where the E.W.R.F. van speeds down the street, then suddenly
cuts across two lanes of traffic, almost hitting a heavily
decorated, but now familiar...

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Driven by an incredulous LEONARD RAFFERTY.

LEONARD
(shakes his head)
Didn't even signal.

EXT. INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS AGENCY - LATER

An imposing glass and steel building further down Wilshire.

INT. CAMERON BUTLER'S OFFICE - SAME

BRYAN, still on edge from nearly being taken hostage, is
pacing around a sterile white-tiled waiting room, not unlike
the International Space Station in '2001'. He checks his
watch, then turns to the receptionist, STACY.

BRYAN
Are you sure he knows I'm here?

STACY
I've buzzed him three times, but
I'll tell him again if you want...

She starts to pick up the phone when the office door opens and CAMERON BUTLER, former 'lacrosse bro', now 'entertainment bro' emerges: gym-toned body, bonded teeth, Brioni suit.

He's about to blow through the waiting area when BRYAN catches his attention.

BRYAN
Mister Butler...

BUTLER looks over and smoothly changes his course till he's shaking hands with BRYAN.

BUTLER
Bry, Bry, my guy, long time no see.

He fires an icy stare at STACY.

BUTLER (CONT'D)
Why didn't you tell me Bryan was here?

She throws up her hands in frustration. BUTLER hustles BRYAN into office. As they disappear behind a closed door STACY flips the bird at his retreating back.

INT. CAMERON BUTLER'S OFFICE - I.A.A. - SAME

BUTLER hustles BRYAN into a seat, but he can barely sit still.

BUTLER
So, what's up?

BRYAN
Haven't you seen the news? The Ecumenical Writers Restitution Front took Stauber hostage!

BUTLER
The Economical who? Never heard of them. My guy, if there was a terrorist group running around town taking producers hostage, don't you think I would've heard about it?

The phone interrupts. BUTLER looks at it, then back to BRYAN.

BUTLER (CONT'D)
Sorry, I've got to take this...
(into phone)
Yo, Mike, you fucking animal, how's it hangin'?!...Yeah, three's cool;
(MORE)

BUTLER (CONT'D)

I got my clubs right here...
Charlie... yeah, I guess that would
be okay... see that shot he hit on
eighteen? Pure luck! Yeah, gotta
go. See you there.

He ends the call and turns back to BRYAN.

BUTLER (CONT'D)

Sorry, you were saying?

BRYAN

I don't want to do any more of
these face to face meetings, maybe
a Zoom would be okay, but I don't
feel comfortable doing these
meetings in person.

The phone RINGS again.

BUTLER

Sorry... gotta take this...
(into phone)
Yo?... Hey, Josh... yeah, Mike just
called...that would be fine... Hey,
great shot on eighteen yesterday,
pure skill... Yeah, I'll catch you
at three.

He hangs up and BRYAN begins again.

BRYAN

It's dangerous, and just really
frustrating, like nobody takes me
seriously.

But BUTLER's not paying attention. He stands:

BUTLER

I'm really glad we've had this
chance to talk. Love to chat more,
but I've got a big meeting at
three.

BRYAN

But...

BUTLER

I've got you on the books for a
meeting at Dinero Productions later
this week. You'll knock it out of
the park.

(robotic - as if reading
from a script)

(MORE)

BUTLER (CONT'D)

You're incredibly talented, and
you've got a bright future ahead of
you...

BRYAN stands, disconsolate, heads toward the door.

INT. KITCHEN - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Thoroughly beaten, BRYAN enters, throws his keys on the
table, and crosses to the refrigerator.

He opens the door: A half-gallon of milk, and a container of
ancient take-out Chinese.

He opens a drawer, and finds a pizza menu. He picks up the
phone and dials:

BRYAN

I'd like to order a pizza,
pepperoni and sausage...
(beat - as he listens)
No I don't want pineapple on it.
(beat - as he listens
again)
Why? Because I'm not a psychopath.
(beat)
Twelve sixty-eight? Thanks.

BRYAN sets down the phone, then remembers to check his
wallet: There's a five and four singles.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Fuck my life.

Hurries out into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

The cushions from the sofa have been strewn carelessly around
the room, and every drawer in the room is open. BRYAN stands
in the middle of the room, counting change in his hand.

BRYAN

Twelve, sixty-six, sixty-seven.

He sighs with relief. The DOORBELL rings.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Are you the pizza guy?

MUFFLED VOICE (O.S.)

What? Yeah, sure...

BRYAN opens the door to find a burly DELIVERY MAN, in blue coveralls.

DELIVERY MAN
A & R furniture rental. You're
overdue, so I gotta take your shit.

BRYAN
You said you were the pizza guy.

DELIVERY MAN
I lied. I need cash.

BRYAN
I've got twelve bucks.

DELIVERY MAN
(glancing at his
clipboard)
Let's see. That'll cover the bed or
the laptop

A long beat while BRYAN decides.

BRYAN
The laptop.

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

The DELIVERY MAN and his ASSISTANT are carting away the last of his possessions. BRYAN closes the door behind him, when the DOORBELL rings a third time.

BRYAN
What now?

He opens the door to find the PIZZA DELIVERY BOY.

PIZZA DELIVERY BOY
Somebody order a pizza?

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

BRYAN sits in front of his laptop, watching a Dodgers game online and drinking a bottle of scotch in an otherwise empty apartment.

The doorbell rings. Warily, BRYAN crosses the bare floor and opens the door to find ERRONEOUS standing there.

ERRONEOUS

(looks around)

Wow, man. Place looks different.
New wallpaper or something?

BRYAN

My furniture was repossessed.

ERRONEOUS

Bummer.

(beat)

But you know what they say. If you
love something, set it free...

BRYAN

Yeah... thanks... except that made
absolutely no sense...

ERRONEOUS

So what happened? I thought you
were like the big shot writer?

BRYAN

Yeah, but I can't pitch to save my
life. If there were some way I
could get around that part I'm sure
I could make it.

But ERRONEOUS has already moved on and spotted the ballgame.

ERRONEOUS

Wow... baseball. I can't watch
this... ever since they invented
the designated pitcher...

BRYAN

(wearily)

That's just the American League.
Besides, it's designated hitter.
There's no such thing as a
designated pitcher...

Suddenly, BRYAN is hit by a thought. A smile slowly spreads
across his face.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

(to himself)

That's it! A designated pitcher!
That's what I need!!

(to ERRONEOUS)

Erroneous, I could kiss you...

ERRONEOUS considers this suggestion:

ERRONEOUS

Yeah... I'm basically a Kinsey two and a half so... I guess that'd be cool.

He puckers up. BRYAN rolls his eyes.

BRYAN

It's a figure of speech dude.

INT. BEDROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (INTERCUT W/MELISSA)

Phone to his ear, he tries to get comfortable in the empty, unfurnished space.

BRYAN

How'd you like to pose as my writing partner?

MELISSA

I'd love to help babe, but I'm having some serious doubts about acting, like I'm not sure it's good for me, like karmically.

MELISSA can sense his disappointment, offers a suggestion:

MELISSA (CONT'D)

What about that guy that almost hit you? Wasn't he an actor?

BRYAN

Over my dead body. I'll try Craig's List.

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

BRYAN paces the floor. He's obviously waiting for something or someone. Suddenly, the doorbell rings. BRYAN opens the door to find ACTOR #1 -- early 20s, edgy, weaned on too much Strasberg:

ACTOR #1

I read your ad... you're looking for an actor...

BRYAN

Yes, yes. Come in... please.

ACTOR #1 enters and looks around suspiciously.

ACTOR #1
So, what kind of part is it?

BRYAN
Screenwriter. I need someone who
can pitch my screenplay ideas at
meetings.

BRYAN hands him the notecards with the pitch.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
Here's the pitch... do you want to
give it a shot?

ACTOR #1 glances at the notes.

ACTOR #1
I'm Old-School, Method, I'm going
to need a couple of things to help
me... you know get into character.

BRYAN
Sure... fine... what do you need?

ACTOR #1
For a screenwriter? Let's see... an
eight-ball, a bottle of Patron, and
a couple hours to just dive into a
deep well of despair...

BRYAN'S face falls.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

ACTOR #2, eighty years old if she's a day, dressed in an old
floral dress and thick bifocals.

ACTOR #2
...and I don't do stunts on account
of my bad hip... and I have a spot
of trouble with my eyes... doc says
cataracts... went to have 'em
removed but the damned operation
cost too much... oh, and I have a
bit of trouble remembering my
lines, so you gotta keep 'em
short... two or three words...

BRYAN is nodding with a very bored expression. This has
obviously been going on for a while.

ACTOR #1, lines of coke and half empty bottle of Patron in
front of him, is crying like a baby. BRYAN looks on in
horror.

ACTOR #2 again, standing in the front door, her glasses perched atop her head.

ACTOR #2 (CONT'D)
Did I leave my glasses here?

ACTOR #3, mid-thirties, well-meaning but a little slow.

ACTOR #3
So, let me get this straight... I'm a screenwriter and I'm trying to sell my pitch... right?

BRYAN
(clearly losing patience)
Yes... exactly. Like I said before, you're going to pitch a story idea.

ACTOR #3
To you.

BRYAN
No, to the producer.

ACTOR #3
And who are you, then?

BRYAN
Like I said, I'm your writing partner. I'll answer all the questions, you just give the pitch.

ACTOR #3
(seeming to finally get it)
Ahh, I think I follow you now, I'm giving the pitch, and you're my partner, the one who answers the questions.

BRYAN
Yes, exactly.

ACTOR #3
Good, good, I got it now. Just one question.

BRYAN
Yes?

ACTOR #3
What's a pitch?

END MONTAGE.

BRYAN standing at the door, speaking to someone who's obviously on their way out.

BRYAN
Don't worry, I'll call you if I
change my mind.

He closes the door, then slumps against it.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
Fucking Craig's List.

He rests there for a moment, then gathers his strength and heads to the bottle of scotch atop his television. He pours himself a quick drink and tries to unwind when there's a knock on the door. Fearing the worst, BRYAN crosses over to the door and opens it to find:

LEONARD
Oh. Hi.

BRYAN
What are you doing here?!

LEONARD
The ad. I came about the part. I'm
Leonard...

BRYAN
...Rafferty... I know.
(on his look)
It was written all over your car.

LEONARD
Mind if I come in, or do you want
to hold the audition out here on
the front step?

THIRD EYE THEO (V.O.)
"...people, places and situations
that have been deliberately placed
in your path, to help get you where
you need to go..."

BRYAN
(to LEONARD)
Okay, come in.

LEONARD enters and takes a look around.

LEONARD
You Marie Kondo'ed the shit out of
this place. Very Zen. I like it.
So, what's the part?

BRYAN

(wearily)

I need someone to play my writing partner, someone to pitch my ideas to producers.

LEONARD

I gotcha... a designated pitcher.

BRYAN starts to warm up. Finally, someone understands.

BRYAN

Exactly! You'd go to meetings with me and present the pitches. I'll answer any questions, and if we sell something, you'll get a percentage.

LEONARD

Fair enough. You got any lines for me?

BRYAN

Last guy finished off the eight ball.

LEONARD

No. I mean do you have a pitch for me to read?

BRYAN breathes a sigh of relief then digs out the index cards and hands them over.

BRYAN

It's called "Central Avenue". It's a romance.

LEONARD looks over the cards then hands them back to BRYAN.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Don't you want these?

LEONARD

Don't worry, I got it in my head, photographic memory. Should I start?

BRYAN

Sure, go ahead.

LEONARD breathes in deeply, then begins.

LEONARD

Nineteen fifty. A young, beautiful,
up and coming singer, Mary Ellen,
makes her way through the backstage
of the Downbeat club...

BRYAN looks on in awe. LEONARD's delivery is flawless,
mesmerizing.

INT. LIVING ROOM - BRYAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

LEONARD is finishing up the pitch. BRYAN watches with abroad
smile. Never have his words sounded so good.

LEONARD

...and, with her kiss still fresh
on his lips, he closes his eyes for
the last time...and dies....

A beat. BRYAN is momentarily speechless.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Did I get it?

BRYAN

You better believe it!

They shake hands enthusiastically.

LEONARD

When do we start?

BRYAN

End of the week, at Dinero
Productions.

They finish shaking, LEONARD leaves. BRYAN closes the door
behind him:

BRYAN (CONT'D)

I guess it's time to "catch a ride,
and go places"...

(immediately questions
himself)

I can't believe I just said that.

FADE OUT.

END OF PILOT