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Whiskey Cup

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WHISKEY CUP

EXT. COUNTRY BAR STAGE - NIGHT (OKLAHOMA, 1984)

Humid night outside The Rusty Spur, neon flickering. A sweaty, rowdy crowd screams as STORM, RAY, and FRANKIE (all in their 20s) – rip through last chorus of “Whiskey Cup.”

STORM

(Into Mic)

Thank you, Kirksville! You’ve been
wild – we’re The Hawks!

Crowd roars. Guitars fade. Storm grins, wiping sweat with a towel.

Attractive blonde steps up, slides him a folded napkin.

BLONDE GIRL

Map to the lake.

STORM

Wouldn’t miss it.

She smirks, walks off with friends. Storm enjoys the view.

EXT. BAR PARKING LOT - NIGHT

STORM and FRANKIE load amps into a dented Astro van. Storm wipes forehead, irritated.

STORM

Where the hell’s Ray?

FRANKIE

I’ve got a guess.

Bar door slams open – RAY, shorter, muscular, eyes wild, bursts out, sniffing, manic grin.

RAY

Holy shit, we killed it! (sings
off-key) ♪ Take my whiskey cup and
fill it up, up, up-! ♪

He jumps on Storm’s back, laughing.

STORM

You okay to drive, Rockstar?

RAY

I’m golden. Two beers, tops.

STORM

Not the beers I'm worried about.

Ray rubs his nose. Sniffs.

FRANKIE

We smell like death, man.

STORM

My place, showers, then we grab beer.

They shut the van doors, pile in.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The van fishtails out of dirt lot, barely missing another car. Dust and music trail behind.

INT. VAN - MOVING

Storm rides shotgun. Ray drives, jittery. Frankie's wedged between amps in back.

STORM

Try keeping it on the road, huh?

Ray cackles, slaps steering wheel, singing along to an Allman Brothers cassette.

STORM (CONT'D)

Jake's is open. Cheapest 24-pack in the county.

Ray glances back at Frankie, grinning.

RAY

Beer run - the real encore. (to Storm) This has nothing to do with the cute girl behind the counter?

STORM

Donna? Got a boyfriend, I think.

FRANKIE

So did Kelly. And Leanne. And Tammy.

Storm smirks despite himself.

EXT. JAKE'S CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Flickering JAKE'S sign buzzes over empty lot.

DONNA WORKMAN (22), pretty brunette, hauls trash bag to dumpster. Hears an engine whining in distance. On way back to store, notices extra piece of trash. Picks it up, walks back to dumpster.

Headlights approach - too fast.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Ray fumbles with the tape, laughing.

RAY

C'mon, don't eat my favorite-

He drops it, reaches down. Van veers, teeters toward store lot.

STORM

Eyes up, Ray-

CRASH.

A brutal thud. Metal screams.
Frankie slams against the back door.

EXT. JAKE'S PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Dust settles.

Donna lies crumpled against building - blood from temple, leg bent wrong.

Storm and Frankie spill out of van. Ray sits frozen behind wheel, shaking.

FRANKIE

Oh, fuck. Oh fuck.

STORM

Let's get 'er to Valley View. Five minutes up the road.

FRANKIE

Call an ambulance! There's a payphone-

STORM

They'll take forever.

They lift Donna — careful, panicked — into the back of van.

INT. VAN - MOVING

Donna's unconscious, blood on Storm's shirt. He presses a rag to her wound.

STORM
Left on Apple, Ray. Valley View.
Left!

No answer.

STORM (CONT'D)
Ray—what the hell are you—

Donna's eyes snap open.

DONNA
(panicked)
Where are we? What— my leg!

She thrashes, screams. Storm tries to calm her. She scratches his neck.

DONNA (CONT'D)
Don't touch me!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Van jerks to stop. Dust settles.

Then -

GUNSHOT. Smokes wafts out van windows.

EXT. JAKE'S CONVENIENCE STORE - LATE NIGHT

The glow from Jake's sign flickers over dust and gravel.

Unmarked police car rolls in slow, lights flashing, no siren.

MARK SAMS (late 50s) — lean, sleepless eyes, old denim jacket — stands beside JAKE STICE (late 60s), heavier, sweat-stained, wiping his hands on a rag.

Detective JEFF CROSS (mid-30s) climbs out of car. Big frame, cheap suit.

DET. CROSS

Dispatch said the Workman girl's missing? Dentist's kid, right?

MARK

Yeah. I stopped in for smokes. Store was open, lights on... nobody here. (pauses) Donna always works Saturday nights.

DET. CROSS

You called Jake.

MARK

Names on the sign.

JAKE

Donna's steady. Never late, never gone early. Nothing missing, door unlocked. Whole place felt... wrong.

Cross nods, sizing them up, heads for the door.

INT. JAKE'S STORE - CONTINUOUS

Bell chimes softly as Cross enters. Fluorescents overhead. Shelves neat. Nothing obviously out of place.

Steps behind counter - opens register: cash intact. Purse sits tucked beneath counter. Closed. Untouched.

Cross glances around once more, then grabs a soda from cooler. cracks it open on edge of counter, takes long drink.

Leaves store. Bell chimes again - sound feels too loud.

EXT. JAKE'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cross lights cigarette, leans on car. Takes long drag.

DET. CROSS

Anybody ever give her trouble?
(beat) She is a sweet piece of-

He stops short, half-smile. Mark and Jake both look down, uncomfortable.

JAKE

(nods)

Couple of creeper calls now and then. Comes with the territory. Been that way since I bought the place, back in '80.

Silence.

JAKE (CONT'D)

There's that Harjo kid. Hangs around some. Told her I'd say something. She said he was harmless.

DET. CROSS

Indian kid, Grant Harjo?

JAKE

That's the one.

Cross flicks his cigarette, crushes it under his boot. Spits.

EXT. COUNTRY LAKE - LATE MORNING

The Oklahoma sun burns high. Empty beer cans glint in the grass. Pickup trucks, coolers, half-naked bodies lie scattered across lakeshore - wreckage of a long night.

Storm, shirtless, stirs on a blanket. Groggy. Squints against the light, looks at sleeping girl beside him.

Sits up, rubs neck. Dried blood. A flicker of memory hits - headlights, screaming, a gunshot.

He stumbles to a tree and vomits.

Nearby, Frankie hunched over by the water, throwing up too.

Storm wipes his mouth, staggers toward him.

STORM

(squinting)

You seen Ray? Or the van?

FRANKIE

Kinda fuzzy... He said he had to go. Took off 'round four.

Storm scans the shoreline - no van, no gear.

STORM
With our stuff.

FRANKIE
Yeah. That's the least of our
problems, hoss.

They both drop down in the dirt, side by side.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
It's gotta be near noon. We should
get to the cops.

Storm stares at the ground, jaw tight.

STORM
(irritated)
And tell 'em what? That we helped
dump a body in the woods? Then came
here to party like nothin'
happened?

Frankie wipes his eyes, tears starting.

STORM (CONT'D)
Get it together. We think this
through. Ray's gone, he's not
talkin'. I'm not talkin'. You're
not talkin'. Nobody saw us.

Long pause.

STORM (CONT'D)
If we walk into that station, it's
over. The band, the gigs, any shot
at gettin' out of this place— gone.
We go to prison for somethin' we
didn't even start. He had the gun.
We didn't have a choice.

FRANKIE
We have a one now.

Frankie looks at him — pleading.

Before Storm can answer, the girl from last night stumbles
over, still half-drunk, bottle in hand.

She holds it out. Storm takes it, gulps deep. Passes to
Frankie.

Long pull. Burns.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Dim, concrete room. GRANT HARJO (56), inmate #206909, lies on bunk, reading worn paperback. Meticulous cell— small sketches pinned neatly on wall.

INMATE appears in doorway.

INMATE

Harjo — it's Monday, man. Tulsa
Cops in five.

GRANT

(sighs, dog-ears page)
Wouldn't wanna miss that.

Grant stands, slides on state-issued shoes, and steps into corridor.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights buzz. INMATES gather around old TV bolted to a steel bracket. Tulsa Cops theme blares — sirens, chases, flashing lights.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Tonight — on Tulsa Cops!

Room erupts with laughter and hoots. Grant sits quietly in a plastic chair, distant. He glances at clock: 8:00 p.m.

ON TV: Bodycam footage. Cops tackle a suspect. Lights, shouting — chaos.

Cut to commercial.

A movie trailer begins — a middle-aged Black man in a prison jumpsuit, speaking through a visiting-room phone.

MAN ON SCREEN

They gonna try to kill me for the
sixth time? (pauses) I thought this
was America.

He sets phone down, head bowed.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Now playing nationwide — Jamie
Lawson stars in Try Me Six Times,
inspired by the wrongful conviction
of Harold Crum..

Grant stares at screen. something flickers behind his eyes.

He looks up at clock again: 8:03 p.m.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM - ONE WEEK LATER

Same room. Same show.

Grant sits again — this time, a sheet of paper in front of
him, pencil tucked behind his ear.

Tulsa Cops intro blares. trailer reappears.

Grant begins drawing, fast and focused.

Cut between TV images — the actor's face, the visiting glass
— and Grant's hand, sketching each line with precision.

The clock hits 8:03.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM - ONE WEEK LATER

Another Monday.

Grant sits in same chair. No paper this time. Just watching.

The trailer appears again — same voice, same line: "They
gonna try to kill me for the sixth time?"

Grant closes his eyes. Breathes deep. Opens them again — and
smiles, faintly.

INT. PRISON CELL - EARLY MORNING

Sunlight creeps through the bars.

Grant sits at a small desk. The wall beside him is lined with
drawings of movie scenes and actors — intricate, haunting
portraits.

He picks one up — the sketch of Jamie Lawson from the trailer
— folds it neatly into thirds, slides into envelope.

He writes something across the front — a name we can't see.

Grant looks at it for a long moment, places it gently on desk.

INT. VEHICLE - DAY

JAMIE LAWSON, black, stylish, fit, early forties, rides in back seat of SUV, slows in downtown Chicago traffic. Late summer sunlight glints off glass towers.

The DRIVER, white, 50s, glances back.

DRIVER

Here it is, Mr. Lawson. (beat) I never do this, but... could I get a selfie? My daughter will go bananas.

Jamie flashes his trademark smile.

JAMIE

Absolutely.

The driver fumbles with phone, snapping several quick selfies. Jamie obliges, grinning.

The driver's head drops to his phone, already typing furiously.

EXT. BUSY CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Jamie steps out of SUV, squinting up at a sleek, glass skyscraper. Straightens jacket and strides toward revolving door.

INT. BUILDING ATRIUM - DAY

Kelly JONES, tall, early 40s, sharp suit and energy to match, waits anxiously in lobby. Spots Jamie and breaks into wide grin.

KELLY

Chicago's own Jamie Lawson. Academy Award Nominee.

JAMIE

Thanks to your wife. Should've been "winner." Next time.

They hug warmly - old friends.

KELLY

Nice to see you outside Louisiana.

JAMIE

Don't let the good people of Louisiana hear you say that. They can be mean. (beat) How's Tricia? Cooking something up for me?

KELLY

You know her — always writing. She's got a new one. Crime drama for FX.

JAMIE

Is the lead a handsome Black guy?

KELLY

Aren't you past TV now, Mr. Movie Star?

They share a laugh, approach elevators.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

They step inside. YOUNG BUSINESSWOMAN glances at Jamie, trying to place him. Kelly presses 42.

JAMIE

This isn't exactly what I pictured. When I wrote that check, I thought you were still a fledgling non-profit.

KELLY

Wait till you see the bathroom in my office. Well, near my office. (beat) We lucked out — a civil firm upstairs leases us a floor for practically nothing. One of their partners likes what we do.

Elevator dings. Doors open to sleek reception area.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUOUS

Receptionist LAURA, late 20s, beams when she sees Jamie.

KELLY

Laura, this is—

LAURA
(interrupting))
Mr. Lawson. A pleasure.

JAMIE
Just Jamie, please. Nice to meet
you, Laura.

LAURA
Everyone's waiting in the
conference room.

Kelly leads Jamie down hall. Framed "Try Me Six Times" movie
poster hangs prominently – Jamie on cover.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie and Kelly enter, applause. Eight BOARD MEMBERS stand.
Jamie waves it off, grinning.

JAMIE
What would've happened if I gave
two million?

Laughter.

KELLY
We save the balloons for Academy
Award winners.

More laughter. The group settles.

JESSICA BEESON, late 60s, dignified, rises.

JESSICA
Lovely to have you here, Jamie.
We're big fans – of the film and of
your work in wrongful convictions.
And the donation...
(Smile)

Quick applause. Kelly nods to Jamie.

KELLY
I thought it'd be fun to start with
how you got involved with Try Me
Six Times.

JAMIE
Heard the story on NPR. (beat,
smiling). Yeah, Black people listen
to NPR.

Laughter.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

I thought, man, they really wanted his Black ass. Tried six times for the same murder — didn't even know that was legal. Then I saw a photo of Harold Crum — could've been my brother. Same haircut, same gap, same build. I figured I wouldn't even have to act — just learn a Cajun accent.

(beat) I was the "funny guy" for years. But this story — this was real. Important. A friend told me it was being developed for film, and I called my agent that day.

JESSICA

That simple?

JAMIE

With this smile?

Laughter again.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

But Crum died before being cleared. That's what hooked me. That, and meeting Kelly in New Orleans. (beat). We can't let this keep happening. Not to our people. Not to anyone.

The room quiets.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Anyway, let's hear what you've got going on.

Jessica clicks a remote. Charts and figures flash on a screen.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

The meeting wraps. Handshakes, hugs, polite thanks. Kelly tugs Jamie by elbow.

KELLY

You have to see this.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie sits as Kelly rummages in a drawer. Slides sheet of paper across desk.

Jamie looks down.

KELLY

It's by a sort-of client.

Jamie picks it up. A pencil portrait of himself as Harold Crum — the same tilt of the head, same eyes. Only these eyes... they see him.

He goes still.

JAMIE

(quiet)

How'd he—?

He turns the page in the light. The strokes are delicate, obsessive — every shadow, every wrinkle under the eyes.

KELLY

Guy's name's Grant Harjo. Inmate in Oklahoma. Does portraits from movie trailers.

JAMIE

He drew this from the trailer?

KELLY

Mm-hm. Never seen the movie.

Jamie traces a finger near the lines of his own jaw — careful, reverent.

Silence. The hum of the office. Jamie sets the sketch down gently, as if it's alive.

JAMIE

You said "sort of client?"

KELLY

We think he's innocent. Clerk kidnapped from a convenience store, 1984. They arrested Grant — he had a crush on her, but harmless. The detective leaned on him, hard. Eight-hour interrogation. Threats. Lies. He breaks, confesses. (beat) Says he stabbed her twenty times, burned the body. Eight days later they find her — shot, not stabbed.

(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)

Not raped. Not burned. None of it mattered. Convicted. Life.

JAMIE

No DNA?

KELLY

You're catching on. Evidence "lost." Maybe destroyed. We've searched for years.

JAMIE

So... can anything be done?

KELLY

Had an idea. You did say you wanted to do more than write checks.

JAMIE

I did.
(Hands up in mock
surrender)

KELLY

We want you to help with Grant's upcoming parole hearing.

JAMIE

So - send a famous Black movie star to Oklahoma to charm a bunch of white folks? (grinning) And bring my favorite Black lesbian sidekick?

KELLY

Here's the twist - the governor's a law-and-order conservative. (beat)
But he's a fan of your movie.

Kelly shows him her phone - a photo of a smiling white man with his wife outside a theater. The caption reads:

"Just saw Jamie Lawson's new movie. Incredible! Inspiring example of how the power of Christ reaches us in unexpected places."

Jamie raises an eyebrow. Kelly smiles.

INT. VEHICLE - CHICAGO - AFTERNOON

A black SUV winds through rough stretch of the South Side. Jamie rides in back, dressed casually — hat low, hoodie up.

Outside car window: boarded-up stores, crumbling brick houses, kids playing basketball on bent rim.

The driver, Eastern European, late 40s, glances at Jamie in the mirror.

DRIVER

I never do this... but my wife —
she'll never believe me.

He raises his phone, awkward smile.

JAMIE

(laughs)
Sure.

They take a few selfies. Jamie flashes that million-dollar grin.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

You do me a favor? Wait here — I
won't be long.

The driver glances around neighborhood, uneasy.

DRIVER

For you, Mr. Lawson... okay.

JAMIE

Just Jamie.

Jamie opens door, steps out.

EXT. SOUTH SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Hot summer air. Sirens echo in the distance.

Jamie takes long look around — beat-up cars, broken glass, stoops with people watching. Takes a breath.

Walks up to three-story brick row house, knocks gently.

Door creaks open. MISS BROWN (late 70s) — heavysset Black woman with kind eyes and cane — peers out, squinting.

MISS BROWN

Well now... my eyes ain't what they
used to be, but it sure looks like
movie star Jamie Lawson on my
porch.

JAMIE

(soft grin)
Still sharp as ever, Miss Brown.
It's me — more handsome than ever.
And richer.

They share a warm laugh. She pulls him into a hug, long and
genuine.

MISS BROWN

Nice Chicago summer day.

She nods toward two rickety chairs on the porch.

JAMIE

That'd be my choice.

They sit. A police siren wails past — both glance
instinctively down block.

MISS BROWN

Not much has changed. Glad you got
out.

JAMIE

Me too. (beat) Thanks to
basketball.

MISS BROWN

Mmhmm.

A long pause. Jamie looks down at hands.

JAMIE

But your boys didn't.

Miss Brown stares out toward street — eyes glassy, voice
quiet.

MISS BROWN

Deon made his own choices.

JAMIE

Still...

MISS BROWN

Don't do that, Jamie. You've
carried enough guilt.

(MORE)

MISS BROWN (CONT'D)
(beat) What you're doing now —
helping those folks get a fair shot
— that matters...Not a day goes by
without some story around here
about a crooked cop getting
witnesses to lie.

Jamie nods, eyes wet.

Across street, kids dribble basketballs, laughing as they pass.

Jamie watches them — smiles through the ache. Behind him, his rideshare car pulls away. He laughs softly, shakes head.

EXT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING - OKLAHOMA CITY - DAY

A hulking concrete building looms over a noisy crowd. Signs wave: "Grant Is Innocent." "Throw Away the Key."

Jamie steps out of black car beside Kelly. Reporters swarm.

REPORTER 1
Mr. Lawson! What did the governor
say about Grant Harjo's innocence?

REPORTER 2
Jamie — what would you say to Donna
Workman's family if Harjo walks
free?

Jamie gives polite smile, says nothing, and shoulders past them.

INT. PAROLE BOARD ROOM - DAY

Sterile, windowless government chamber. Five board members sit behind long table — bureaucrats in cheap suits, blank faces.

Kelly sets stack of papers on folding table. Next to her: CAL HOBSON, late 60s, red-faced and self-satisfied. Behind them, rows of metal chairs hold onlookers — including the WORKMAN FAMILY and Jamie, standing in the back.

CHAIRMAN

We are here on the parole matter of inmate Grant Harjo, number 102567.
(pause) Ms. Jones, you may begin.

Kelly stands, nervous but steady.

KELLY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For twelve years I've represented Grant Harjo. I've stood here before — five years ago, to be exact — and recited every letter of support, every achievement, every certificate.
(beat) You've all read those. So I'll tell you what happened after that hearing.

She glances at Grant's image on monitor — grainy video from prison.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I drove straight to Statesville to tell him he'd been denied. He took one look at me and knew. (softly) But instead of anger, he thanked me. Said he'd pray for me. Said tomorrow he'd wake up knowing he was innocent. (beat) And if he didn't wake up — he knew where he was going.

Kelly pauses, emotion flickering but contained.

KELLY (CONT'D)

That's the man I know. That's who you're judging today.

She sits. A quiet weight settles over room.

CHAIRMAN

Thank you, Ms. Jones. Mr. Hobson.

Cal stands slowly, belly pressing against table. Turns toward the Workman family, gives a small, performative nod.

CAL

Well... let's see. Our inmate got his GED. Associate's degree. Even learned to weld. (claps once, mock applause) Real model citizen.

Uncomfortable chuckles.

CAL (CONT'D)

That's what your packets say. But
let me tell you what those pages
don't.

He leans forward, voice dropping.

CAL (CONT'D)

April 28th, 1984. Edna, my
hometown. Grant Harjo had a crush
on a girl who worked the night
shift at Jake's Store. Donna
Workman. She smiled at him when he
came in for beer and smokes. Said
no when he asked her out. That was
her mistake.

FLASH - INTERCUT: THE CRIME (1984)

— A beat-up Chevy idles under a buzzing streetlight. — A
young man in flannel chugs beer, eyes wild. — A revolver
glints on the seat. — Donna at the cash register, talking on
the phone.

CAL (V.O.)

He sat out there drinking, snorting
God knows what, stewing because she
said no.

— The man kicks open the store door. — Donna freezes. — A
flash of hair, a scream.

CAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He dragged her into his truck. Out
to some dark field. She begged for
her life.

— A knife slices through denim. — Tears. Gunshots. Silence.

CAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Three shots to the head. When one
would've done.

BACK TO PAROLE ROOM

Cal stands trembling, sweat pooling at his collar.

CAL

Eight days her body lay in that
field before anyone found her. Her
own father — Dr. John Workman — had
to dig out her dental records to
identify what was left.

He glares at Kelly, then back at the board.

CAL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
But sure — inmate Harjo got a B+ in
college accounting.

He slaps his papers down and collapses into his chair.

CHAIRMAN
Thank you, Mr. Hobson.
(beat)
Mr. Harjo, can you hear us?

On screen: Grant, sitting stiffly in a gray jumpsuit.

GRANT
(static)
...Yes... can you—

The feed crackles.

CHAIRMAN
Barely. Try again.

GRANT
(muffled, broken)
I just want—

The monitor hisses with static.

CHAIRMAN
Not the first time this has
happened. (to the board) We have
his written statement. We'll take
it into consideration.

He straightens his papers.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)
All opposed?

Four hands rise.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)
All in favor?

Only the Chairman raises his hand — half-hearted.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)
Parole denied. Inmate Harjo may
reapply in five years.

Kelly closes her eyes, exhales. Jamie's jaw tightens.

On screen, Grant still speaks into static – unheard.

EXT. WHISKEY CUP SALOON - DAY

Gleaming, lifted pickup rolls into gravel lot – chrome flashing in Oklahoma sun. Custom plate reads: "STORM1."

Storm, now 57, handsome and weathered, steps out. Boots polished, sunglasses mirrored. Looks up at sign: "Whiskey Cup Saloon."

INT. WHISKEY CUP SALOON - DAY

The restaurant hums with prep – staff setting up for lunch rush. Country music plays low.

Storm strolls in, grin wide, energy bright.

STORM

We figure out that fryer mess?

WORKER

Think so, boss. New one's on the way – be here tomorrow.

STORM

And I'll be fifteen grand poorer.

From behind bar, the MANAGER, mid-40s, playful, leans out with a smirk.

MANAGER

Judging by that truck outside, your TV show, the Grammy, and that movie-star girlfriend – I think you'll live.

STORM

Fair.

They bump fists.

The two mock-wrestle for a second, laughing like old friends. Storm slides onto bar stool.

Photos line the walls – Storm on stage with country legends, handshakes, award shows.

The BARTENDER sets a soda in front of him. Two TVs hang overhead — one on ESPN, the other tuned to local news. On the news screen, a photo of GRANT HARJO flashes up. Storm squints.

STORM (CONT'D)
Hey, turn that up, will ya? That Harjo story — I played ball with him.

The bartender grabs the remote, ups volume.

ON TV The local anchor reads over footage of protestors outside parole building.

ON TV
Grant Harjo will remain in an Oklahoma prison for at least five more years, after the parole board denied his release yesterday.

Cut to Cal outside the building, sweating under TV lights.

CAL HOBSON (ON TV)
We firmly believe Grant Harjo raped and killed Donna Workman. In this state, we don't let murderers walk free — I don't care how many movie stars come down here.

Back to the anchor.

ANCHOR (ON TV)
District Attorney Hobson was referring to actor Jamie Lawson, who lobbied the Governor on Harjo's behalf. Lawson, a vocal wrongful-conviction advocate, urged the governor to grant clemency. The board, however, voted four to one to deny parole...

AT THE BAR

Storm stares at screen — jaw tight. A flicker of memory behind his eyes. Pulls out vape pen, sneaks a drag.

Big exhale.

A mist drifts through the bar — ghostly, fading.

INT. TRENDY RESTAURANT - OKLAHOMA CITY - DAY

Rain smears across big front windows. Inside, soft indie music clashes with the anxious chatter of lunch crowd.

Kelly stirs a margarita. Jamie nurses a beer, slouched in chair.

Every TV in bar shows weather coverage – swirling red radar maps, a breathless weatherman warns of “potential supercells.”

JAMIE

'Fuck is a supercell?

KELLY

No idea. But that was a super clusterfuck.

She takes a long sip.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Didn't even let Grant speak. Board had their minds made up.

JAMIE

I thought we had it. The governor was all in.

KELLY

He can't interfere. Separation of powers and all that.

JAMIE

You think me showing up hurt him?

KELLY

No. We've been at this fifteen years. Grant's never gotten more than one vote. Not your fault.

Jamie looks up at screen – tornado warnings flashing red across half the state.

JAMIE

You seeing this?

KELLY

Yeah. “High weather event day.” Locals barely notice.

Jamie glances around – everyone in the restaurant seems indifferent, scrolling their phones, unfazed.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You still going to the Thunder game? I'm out. Give my ticket to some pretty lady.

JAMIE

Nah. Feels wrong. (pauses) Getting that kind of news and then sitting courtside?

KELLY

Courtside, huh? Not bad for a kid from Chicago.

JAMIE

(laughs softly)
I'll drink to that.

He raises his beer. They clink glasses.

Long silence, as they drink.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

How do you do this? Lose, over and over, and keep going?

Kelly looks down, thumb tracing rim of glass.

KELLY

You learn to celebrate the rare wins. I've been doing this twenty years. Maybe one victory every two. (smiles faintly) Been a minute though.

JAMIE

So what now?

KELLY

Now we wait. For a miracle. (beat)
They happen sometimes.

Outside, thunder rumbles. The windows flicker with lightning.

They finish their drinks in silence. When they finally stand, the light outside has turned heavy and green.

They hug by the door — weary, close, unspoken affection between them.

EXT. OKLAHOMA CITY - DOWNTOWN - EVENING

Wind whips litter down street. Jamie and Kelly walk in opposite directions.

Jamie pulls two basketball tickets from pocket. Stops outside the glowing Paycom Arena.

A man and his young son, both in Thunder gear, sit on a bench outside — one hot dog between them.

Jamie approaches with a smile.

JAMIE
Thunder Up.

MAN
Thunder Up.

The man squints — recognition dawning.

MAN (CONT'D)
Hey, you're—

Jamie presses a finger to his lips.

JAMIE
Shhh. You two got tickets?

MAN
Yeah, way up top. Loud City. Not the best view, but... it's the playoffs. The energy's nuts up there though. I bet you're courtside?

JAMIE
Not tonight. But you are.

Jamie smiles, hands the man the tickets.

The kid stares at the tickets — eyes wide.

Before the man can react, Jamie's already walking away, head down against the wind.

Thunder rolls.

CHAPTER 10 - TWO YEARS LATER

INT. BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Phone buzzes in the dark. 4:08 A.M.

CORY BREWER (55), graying, thick around the middle but solid, blinks awake. He fumbles for glasses and phone. Screen reads: DISPATCH.

He sighs, answers.

BREWER
You got good news?

DISPATCH (O.S.)
Uh...What? No, Chief Brewer?

BREWER
Yeah. This is him.

DISPATCH (O.S.)
Sorry, sir - your cousin Jeff... he
just- (beat) He shot himself.
Called it in before he did it.
Crews are on scene now.

Silence. Brewer stares into dark.

BREWER
On my way.

Woman beside him stirs, half-asleep.

WOMAN
Let me guess. Good news?

BREWER
Jeff. (beat) He killed himself.

EXT. OLD COUNTRY HOUSE - PRE-DAWN

Lonely farmhouse under black sky. Flash of police lights paints fields blue and red.

Brewer's truck crunches over gravel. Steps out, expression unreadable.

Four officers hover near porch. Crime scene tape flaps in wind.

BREWER
Well?

Young female OFFICER fidgets, clipboard shaking in hands.

OFFICER

Body's in the living room. One shot, through the mouth. 9mm by his side. (pauses) No note. Looks like Crosby.

Brewer nods grimly, ducks under tape, walks inside.

INT. CROSBY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Single lamp flickers. Evidence markers dot room. JEFF CROSBY lies sprawled on floor - gun beside him, spray of blood on faded wallpaper.

Brewer kneels, takes it in. Jaw tightens. Exhales, slow, controlled. Stands and exits.

EXT. CROSBY HOUSE - NIGHT

BREWER

(to the officers)

Do it all by the book. Chain of custody, every photo, every print. (beat) We all know what this is - but I want it clean. A lot of eyes on Edna right now.

He turns away. His gaze catches on a ramshackle shed twenty yards off - tin roof sagging, padlock rusted shut.

He stares at it a long time. Something shifts behind his eyes.

INT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Coffee steams in a paper cup. Brewer sits at his desk, staring at cardboard evidence box labeled:

WORKMAN - CF-1984-786

His fingers drum on the lid.

Older secretary, sharp-tongued but warm, walks up and sets muffin on his desk.

SECRETARY

Pandora's box, Chief?

Brewer looks up, startled.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

Shit — that's actually something,
isn't it?

Brewer gives a small, knowing smirk.

BREWER

Things are about to get a lot more
interesting. (takes the muffin)
Thanks for breakfast.

He grabs box, his phone, and heads for door.

EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Early sunlight breaks through gray sky. Brewer stops on
steps, pulls out phone, and dials.

Rings twice.

BREWER

(into phone))

Kelly. (beat) I've got some news.

He looks out across the quiet town — wind rustling trees like
distant applause.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Metal detectors hum. Clank of sliding doors echoes. Kelly
walks through, calm but tense. Female guard pats her down,
waves her through.

Across room, Grant sits at a plastic table. He stands when he
sees her.

GRANT

Been here too long to expect good
news. (beat) But I figured you
wouldn't come all this way if it
ain't.

KELLY

(smiling slightly)

Best news we've had in a long time,
Grant. You heard about Jeff
Crosby's suicide?

GRANT

Yeah. Saw it on TV. (sits back, shaking head) Guess his past finally caught up with him. Something about the feds?

KELLY

Yup. But that's just the start. Chief Brewer — Jeff's cousin — found something in Crosby's shed. Something that belonged in your case file.

Grant frowns, confused.

GRANT

...Fingernail scrapings?
(Raises eyebrows)

KELLY

You got it.

Grant whistles, low and stunned.

INT. CAL HOBSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Cal sits at desk. The TV behind him plays breaking news report.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

A huge twist tonight in the Grant Harjo case — new DNA evidence has surfaced that could change everything—

Cal mutes TV, annoyed. Checks clock: 4:09 P.M.

He picks up phone, dials.

CAL

Kelly. Let's meet. (beat) But don't bring that actor down here again. I don't want a media circus.

KELLY (O.S.)

I can fly down Wednesday.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Kelly goes through the same security routine. Same buzz, same metallic clang. Grant waits again, eyes bright.

They sit. A long silence before either speaks.

GRANT

Am I getting out of here?

KELLY

That's... sort of up to you now. Here's the deal — the DNA from the fingernails didn't match you, or anyone in the system. But Hobson still won't clear you outright. He says you might've been "involved somehow."

(beat) He's up for re-election, though. Jamie's support has put a lot of eyes on this case.

Grant listens, quiet. Waiting for the catch.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Hobson's offering time served — if you plead no contest. You won't admit guilt, exactly. It gets you home.

Grant leans back, exhaling hard.

GRANT

So I get out?

KELLY

Yes. But—

GRANT

(chuckles)

Lawyers. Always a "but."

KELLY

Conviction still stands. You'll be a convicted murderer and sex offender. You'll have to register. Restrictions, probation. Eyes on you forever.

GRANT

No trick-or-treaters. My face on the internet. Got it. (beat) But I can go home.

KELLY

Yes. Just... be careful. Those cops down there will be gunning for you.

GRANT

I can keep my nose clean. Done it
in here for thirty years.
(quiet pause) What would you do?

Kelly sighs.

KELLY

We could fight. And I think we'd
win. Full exoneration. But it could
take years, maybe more. No
guarantees.(soft smile) The Cowboys
play the Bears Monday night. Jamie
said he'll come watch at your
brother's place if you take the
deal.

A beat — then Grant cracks a grin.

GRANT

Let's do it. (smiles wider) And
tell Jamie — no Bears gear.

They share a quiet, nervous laugh.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

TV crews swarm courthouse steps. Reporters shout questions,
flashes burst. Protesters hold signs — "FREE GRANT HARJO" and
"JUSTICE FOR DONNA." A tense split crowd.

A rideshare car pulls up. Kelly and Jamie step out, dressed
sharp.

KELLY

So much for low key.

They exchange a look, then push through the chaos. Reporters
surge forward.

REPORTER 1

Is Grant Harjo being released
today?

REPORTER 2

Mr. Lawson, are you making a movie
about the case?

REPORTER 3

What would you say to Donna
Workman's family?

Kelly shields her face. Jamie keeps his head down. They slip inside as the doors slam shut behind them.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - MORNING

Cal, in shirtsleeves and tie, stands by his window, watching throng of reporters and protestors below.

Down on the courthouse steps, Jamie and Kelly appear, moving past microphones and shouted questions.

Cal watches them go inside. For a moment, his jaw sets.

He adjusts his cufflinks, checks his watch. Papers are neatly stacked – the Workman file sitting square in the center. He takes a breath.

A soft knock at the door that still startles him.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

Sir?

Cal doesn't turn.

CAL

Yeah.

The door opens. A young ASSISTANT, hesitant, pokes her head in.

ASSISTANT

Mr. Hobson... Donna Workman's brother
and sister are in the waiting room.
Hoping for a chat.

Cal closes his eyes briefly, jaw tightening. He sets his coffee down.

INT. HALLWAY, CAL'S OFFICE

Cal enters a conference room. Seated are a man and woman, in their 50s. Worried, painful looks on their faces. Cal takes a deep breath, enters, and closes the door.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The room buzzes. Spectators whisper. A few hiss "murderer." Deputies scan crowd.

At one table — Kelly sets down her briefcase. Behind her — Jamie sits beside MIKE HARJO (62), Grant's brother. They whisper, hopeful.

Across the aisle — Cal smirks.

A DEPUTY escorts Grant in — handcuffed, but smiling faintly.

KELLY
(To deputy)
Is that really necessary?

DEPUTY
Sheriff's orders, ma'am.

Grant mouths to her — It's okay. Then sits, composed. Murmurs ripple through crowd.

At bench, JUDGE ROBERT JAMESON (72) adjusts glasses.

JAMESON
We're here for a status conference
in State of Oklahoma versus Grant
Harjo.

KELLY
Your honor, the parties have
reached an agreement with District
Attorney Hobson.

Jameson looks to Cal.

JAMESON
Is that so, Mr. Hobson?

CAL
Actually, your honor — after
further consultation with the
victim's family and reconsideration
of the facts, the State is not open
to further negotiation.

Kelly freezes. Jamie's jaw clenches. Grant looks back at him, confused.

KELLY
Your honor, the defense and
prosecution had an agreement — in
light of new exculpatory DNA
results—

JAMESON
Mr. Hobson, is that true?

CAL

We discussed a deal. Nothing formalized. If Ms. Jones has further motions, we're ready to argue them here.

Jameson sighs, unimpressed.

JAMESON

Ms. Jones?

Kelly turns to Grant. Whispers.

KELLY

(whispers)

Grant, I'm so sorry. Looks like the pressure got to Cal. Deal's off.

GRANT

What do we do?

KELLY

Continue with our motion to vacate the conviction.

GRANT

Am I going home?

Kelly looks down.

KELLY

Not today, Grant. I'm sorry.

JAMESON (O.S.)

Ms. Jones — do you have a motion?

Kelly stands. Smooths her jacket, takes a breath.

KELLY

Yes, your honor. (beat) The sign outside this courthouse says "Justice for All." Mr. Harjo was denied that justice 34 years ago — convicted through the work of Detective Jeff Crosby, a man now tied to three other wrongful convictions. (beat) If it weren't for his death — and the evidence found in his own shed — this would have stayed buried forever. Fingernail scrapings from Donna Workman, containing blood, point to another, unidentified offender.

(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)
We don't know who killed Donna. But
we know it wasn't my client. I
stand on our motion — and pray this
court upholds Justice for All.

Kelly sits. Exhausted. Defeated.

Jameson nods slightly. Turns to Cal.

JAMESON
Mr. Hobson?

Cal rises — smug, slow.

CAL
You have our opposition, your
honor. (beat) Inmate Harjo
confessed. He's guilty. Just
because they found DNA that doesn't
match him doesn't mean he didn't do
it. Donna Workman was shot — and
last I checked, you can shoot
someone without leaving DNA in
their fingernails.

He sits. Kelly stares straight ahead.

The room hums with tension.

JAMESON
Based on the evidence before me...
(beat — silence) I see no
sufficient grounds to vacate the
conviction.

The gavel cracks.

The courtroom exhales — whispers, shuffling, reporters
scribbling.

Kelly stares straight ahead, stunned. Jamie's hands clench
around the chair in front of him.

Grant doesn't move.

He keeps his eyes on the judge.

The deputies step in behind him, cuffs ready, but Grant
doesn't flinch. He studies Jameson's face. No tears. No
collapse. Just a slow inhale.

He nods once. Not to agree, but to mark the moment.
To say: *I saw you.*

KELLY
(whispers)
We'll keep fighting, Grant.

Grant finally turns toward her. A faint, tired smile.

The deputies clasp the cuffs. He looks back to the bench one last time, calm now. Grant is led away.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

SUPER: Two Years Later

Summer in Oklahoma City. Hip neighborhood. Cafés hum with lunchtime chatter; thirty-somethings stroll between shops.

A dusty Ford Fusion sits behind a row of buildings. Inside, SHANE BEALS (45) - scruffy, sharp-eyed, in a wrinkled polo - watches the back door of a sushi restaurant.

He checks his watch. Then the door again.

Young red-haired cook steps out, lights cigarette, plops onto crate.

SHANE
(to himself)
Okay, here we go.

Shane grabs phone, exits car, pretending to talk.

SHANE (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Yeah, I'm here. You wanna meet at Joe's? Sit outside... (paces casually)

He positions himself twenty feet from the cook, still fake-talking.

Cook smokes coolly, checks phone, finishes. Walks over to a metal ash can and neatly flicks cigarette inside.

SHANE (CONT'D)
You gotta be kidding me...

Cook disappears inside. Shane stares, defeated, then dials.

SHANE (CONT'D)
(into phone)
No, I didn't get it.
(MORE)

SHANE (CONT'D)
You won't believe this one. Spent a
whole day out here...

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Shane sits at cluttered desk — computer monitor glowing.
Office bare except for giant whiteboard full of names, most
uncrossed.

On screen: Kelly and JAMIE on video call.

SHANE
Wasted my day.

Kelly and Jamie laugh.

KELLY
Still get paid, though.

SHANE
At my nonprofit, pull-at-my-
heartstrings, save-the-innocent
rate. (glances at Jamie) Think you
can work that into a movie?

JAMIE
Already working on it — a short
film. Titled: The Courteous Smoker.

SHANE
Catchy. (smiles) Anyway, I got the
DNA sample. Overnighted to the lab.

KELLY
Wait, how'd you manage that?

SHANE
Kid had traffic court the next day.
Smoked in his car beforehand,
tossed the butt in the street.
Guess he's only courteous on the
clock.

KELLY
(laughs)
Nice work. That's three suspects
down. Should be three weeks for
results. (beat) How many more?

Shane glances at whiteboard. Names scrawled in marker — only
three crossed out.

He sighs.

SHANE

Seventeen. And those first three were my top picks. Took me a year and a half to get their DNA.

KELLY

We'll all be retired before you get through that list.

JAMIE

And Grant's got no shot unless we match it — solve the case ourselves?

KELLY

Pretty much. It shouldn't be our job, but here we are. (pauses) I'll keep pushing in court. Maybe the next DA's less afraid of headlines. The Times piece runs this weekend — maybe that stirs something.

JAMIE

Keep at it, Shane.

SHANE

You know I will. (grins) Nonprofit money's still green.

They all chuckle. Call ends.

Shane leans back in chair. Silence. Looks at whiteboard — so many names left.

He grabs a marker, circles one name near the bottom.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Alright, next up.

Caps the pen, stares at board — his private battlefield.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY — EARLY MORNING

Gray dawn over Manhattan. Steam rises from grates. Storm exits a sleek high-rise in flannel and a baseball cap — anonymity over luxury. Head down, moving fast.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Storm stands in line. Quiet morning crowd. Orders without making eye contact.

Grabs New York Times from rack, pays, nods politely to barista, slips out.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Soft morning light filters through sheer curtains. Storm sits on edge of bed, newspaper spread open — front page headline visible: "Wrongfully Convicted Man Still Fights for Justice: The Grant Harjo Case"

Storm reads intently. Coffee cup trembles slightly in hand.

In bed, COURTNEY CROWDER (32) — glamorous even half-asleep — stirs under sheets.

CROWDER

(groggy)

You okay? You left pretty early last night.

Storm doesn't answer. Eyes fixed on article.

CROWDER (CONT'D)

Hey. (snapping fingers softly)
Where are you right now?

STORM

(startled)

Huh? Oh. I'm just— (pauses) I've got a lot going on. The Grammys, the show, your movie premieres... it's a lot.

CROWDER

(smiling, but wounded)

Didn't know my career was a stressor to you.

Crowder slips out of bed, pulls on silk robe, and walks toward bathroom — shutting door a little too hard.

Storm doesn't look up. Just breathes deeply. Eyes drop back to newspaper. A photo of Grant Harjo stares up.

A long beat.

Storm folds paper in half — as if hiding something.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

Heat waves ripple over cracked concrete. RAY "BONES" McALISTER (58) - tattooed, wiry, hardened - cranks out pull-ups on a rusted bar. Each rep slower, heavier. Sweat stings his eyes.

INMATE (O.S.)

Yo, Bones - lookin' ripped. They cut your commissary or somethin'?

BONES

Nah. Gettin' cut for the parole board. (beat) They don't wanna send no fatties back out there.

He drops from bar, breath ragged, wipes face with shirt. Scars line torso like a roadmap.

Slips shirt back on and trudges toward cell block.

INT. PRISON CELL - LATER

Dim light flickers from a single bulb. Bones climbs to top bunk, lifts pillow - retrieves a small plastic baggie of pills tucked inside the seam.

He shakes it - counts.

Eighteen.

His expression hardens.

Suddenly his stomach clenches. He lurches for toilet - vomits violently. He grips the rim, gasping, sweat pouring down neck.

Looks up at steel mirror - eyes bloodshot, haunted.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM - DAY

Rec room buzzes with noise - basketball on TV, cards slapping tables. Bones stands in line for phones.

Younger inmate spots him, nods with respect - waves him forward. Others mutter but stay quiet. Bones still carries weight.

He takes receiver, dials. Waits.

BONES
(quietly, low)
Where we at with the house?

Beat. Static hums on the line.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

Golden light cuts through early haze. Storm, robe half-tied, coffee mug in hand, steps out of sprawling country estate. Place is pristine — the man isn't.

At end of long gravel driveway, delivery truck pulls away. Storm squints.

He eyes his ATV, keys hanging in ignition. Thinks about it. Then sighs and starts long walk instead.

Reaches oversized mailbox, pulls out thick envelope. Tears it open. Reads first page.

His face drains. He's suddenly sober. Fishes out his phone, dials.

STORM
You in town? (pause) I need you to
come by. Today.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - LATER

Storm sits slouched on leather couch, large plastic cup in hand. Whiskey bottle visible on kitchen counter.

Across from him, DELLA JOHNSTON (42) — sharp, no-nonsense — balances tablet on her knee, mid-argument.

DELLA
So, let me get this straight. You want me to knock on Dr. Barton's door, ask him how much to buy his family's house — and pay whatever number he says? Then put it under a woman's name I've never heard of? And ask no more questions?

STORM
That's right. (beat) And don't I pay you enough?

DELLA
You pay me to advise you on
financial decisions. Not to hand
out blank checks to strangers.

STORM
Think of it as... charitable giving.

DELLA
That you can't deduct.

STORM
(quietly, annoyed)
You think I look like I'm hurting
for money?

Pause.

STORM (CONT'D)
Look, I need this done quick. Just...
get it done. I've got a lot going
on.

Della studies him. Notices the cup. Then the whiskey bottle.
Her expression softens.

DELLA
You okay, Storm? Courtney called me
the other day. Said she's worried.

Storm rubs temples. Avoids her eyes.

DELLA (CONT'D)
(standing, frustrated)
You ever seen A Star Is Born? The
Bradley Cooper one. That's where
this is heading.

She grabs her bag, heads for door.

STORM
You done?

DELLA
No. (beat) You are. If you keep
this up.

She slams door on way out. Storm sits still, staring into
cup.

CHAPTER 17

EXT. SMALL-TOWN OKLAHOMA - DAY

Rundown Jeep double-parks on half-empty main street. Dusty store fronts, faded "For Rent" signs.

Storm steps out, sunglasses on, hasn't slept. Scans quiet street, spots sign: "Jack Mack, Attorney-at-Law."

Exhales, pushes door open.

INT. JACK MACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Bell chimes. No receptionist. The place looks like time stopped in 1985 - stale coffee smell, legal books collecting dust.

JACK MACK (60s) hollers from the back, mouth full.

JACK
Just a minute!

He emerges, wiping barbecue sauce from chin with napkin tucked into collar.

JACK (CONT'D)
Well, hell. Storm Hudson.
(extends hand) You look rich and miserable.

STORM
Been a minute.

JACK
How's your old man?

STORM
At some luxury senior resort in Naples. Hates every minute of it.

JACK
(laughs)
Sounds about right. Come on back.

They move into a cramped back office. A crooked diploma hangs on the wall.

JACK (CONT'D)
I assume this isn't a social call.

STORM
It is not.
Beat.

STORM (CONT'D)
So... how does this lawyer thing
work?

JACK
(confused)
What do you mean?

STORM
I hire you. Then you can't tell
anyone what I say.

JACK
Attorney-client privilege. Right.

He leans forward, more curious now.

JACK (CONT'D)
What are we talking about?

Storm pulls envelope from jacket, drops it on desk. \$10,000
in cash.

STORM
That make it official?

JACK
Sure does.

Jack reaches for notepad and pen, eyes not leaving envelope.

STORM
No notes.

Jack pauses, then quietly shuts office door.

JACK
(Turns back to Storm)
Drink?

LATER - SAME

Empty glasses between them. Cigarette smoke hangs in air.
Storm's eyes red, distant. Jack leans back, absorbing the
story.

JACK (CONT'D)
Ray's driving, hits the girl. You
and Frankie load her into the van
to get help - but Ray keeps
driving. Donna panics, scratches
you - draws blood.
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
 Ray freaks out, pulls a gun, and...
 (pause) shoots her?

Storm nods, barely breathing.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Next morning, you plan to call the
 cops — but don't. Then Grant Harjo
 gets convicted. Case closed. Fast
 forward 30 years, Crosby eats a
 bullet and they find the fingernail
 DNA in his shed — and you think
 that DNA is...yours.

STORM
 When she scratched me. I remember
 the blood. Didn't think much of it...

Jack exhales, rubs face.

JACK
 Frankie's dead. That leaves you,
 Ray, and now... me. And if Ray's
 reaching out—

STORM
 Made me buy his sister a house.
 Said it'd make things right. He's
 sick, maybe dying. I don't trust
 what a dying man might say.

JACK
 (sighs)
 Legally? You're probably safe.
 Statute of limitations for
 accessory — five years. You can't
 be charged for murder; you didn't
 pull the trigger. Ray's a career
 felon, junkie — nobody would
 believe him anyway.
 (beat) But that DNA... that's the
 wild card.

STORM
 Yeah. The DNA.

JACK
 Corroborates your story, ties you
 to the scene. But your legal risk
 isn't the only problem.

STORM
 Because I'm famous.

JACK

Because you're famous. (leans in)
You've got two options, both
terrible.
Option one: You go public. Tell the
truth. Clear Grant Harjo's name.
(beat) Option two: You keep your
mouth shut. Hope Ray dies quiet.
And drink yourself to sleep every
night until you join him.

Storm stares at the desk. Jack stubs out his cigarette.

STORM

You ever try praying, Jack?

JACK

Once. Didn't take.

STORM

Yeah. Mine didn't either. I'll
stick to drinking I guess.

JACK

Cheers to that
(Raises glass)

INT. PRISON VISITING ROOM - DAY

Fluorescent lights hum. Plastic chairs. A vending machine
buzzes in the corner. Shane sits across from empty seat,
checking watch.

A GUARD leads in Bones — thin, gray, hollow-eyed. Orange
jumpsuit hangs loose.

The guard unlocks the cuffs. Bones rubs wrists, sits with
effort. Breathing ragged.

Long silence. Shane studies him.

SHANE

I'm Shane. Appreciate you meeting
with me. From what I hear, you've
got one hell of a story.

BONES

(chuckles weakly)
Yeah... Buckle up, cowboy.

Shane leans in, presses record on a small audio device.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRISON PARKING LOT - LATER

Shane exits prison, sunglasses on, expression unreadable. Carries manila folder and handwritten statement folded in hand.

Gets into car, shuts door, exhales. Dials.

SHANE

(into phone)

Kelly. I don't know if I believe half of it--hell, even one percent--but if any of it's true, we've got something big. When we got the tip, thought it was bogus, they usually are. Usually.

(pause, listening)

SHANE (CONT'D)

You ever see The Secret Singer?

He hangs up. Sits there a moment, staring out windshield -- prison behind him, sunlight washing over his face.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - TV SET - DAY

Makeup lights glare over cluttered vanity. Empty liquor bottles. Half-eaten catering trays. Gold record leans against wall like a forgotten trophy.

Storm lies on couch, blanket tangled around him, dead asleep. Door opens. Courtney steps in -- instantly hit by the smell.

COURTNEY

Jesus, Storm. They're waiting to shoot. Everyone's ready but you.

Storm stirs, groans, pulls blanket over head.

STORM

Don't feel great. Give me a few hours.

Courtney stares -- disgust turning to disbelief.

COURTNEY

What the hell is going on? You said you'd been sober eight years. I went through this shit with Alex — I'm not doing it again.

Storm sits up halfway, eyes bloodshot.

STORM

I was. Three thousand days. I can handle a drink now and then.

COURTNEY

That's what Alex said. Right before he crashed his Lamborghini into a family. I won't be the actress who keeps dating trainwrecks.

Storm sits up, anger cutting through hangover.

STORM

Looks like you already are.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

A half-empty coffee pot steams in corner. Kelly, Jamie, and Shane sit around cluttered conference table littered with case files, surveillance photos.

SHANE

That's the place. Two gates, cameras on both, and a security team that looks like they just left the Secret Service.

JAMIE

Can't we just get him drunk somewhere, swipe a glass?

SHANE

He doesn't drink in public anymore. Or smoke. Doesn't jog. Doesn't litter. I've been outside that house three nights and a morning. Nothing.

Kelly leans back, thinking.

KELLY

Trash grab?

SHANE

Locked bins. Inside the gate.
Private pickup. I bet they even
shred the mail.

Jamie whistles low.

JAMIE

He's paranoid.

SHANE

I would be if I were him.

Silence settles in. Kelly flips through notes.

KELLY

Okay... what if you can't get to
him — maybe he comes to you.

Jamie looks up.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You're Jamie Lawson. Movie star,
activist. The man's got a hit TV
show — he'd be thrilled to get a
little Hollywood validation. Maybe
you reach out. Say you're studying
for a new role

Jamie smirks, shaking head.

JAMIE

The Black Cowboy?

Everyone laughs.

SHANE

He'd smell it a mile away. Jamie's
been all over this since the failed
parole.

Jamie stands, pacing. Kelly sighs, rubbing temples.

KELLY

**We need his DNA. Without it, Grant
stays in prison.**

No one speaks. The only sound is rain and distant police
siren.

SHANE

Look, I'll keep eyes on him a few
more days. Maybe he slips.

He checks his watch, stands, and grabs jacket.

KELLY

Stay for dinner. I'm making shrimp
and grits. Jamie's coming.

SHANE

Tempting. But I'm hopping on the
next flight. Too much traffic, too
many people in this town.

Kelly walks him to door.

KELLY

You ever stop moving?

SHANE

Like a shark.

They share a look — mutual respect, weariness. Shane exits.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie stands by the window, looking out at the rain.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Come by around seven. Bring wine.

JAMIE

Red or white?

KELLY

Surprise me.

She gives a tired smile. Jamie returns it faintly.

INT. KELLY AND TRICIA'S APARTMENT - CHICAGO - NIGHT

Warm light. Jazz playing low. The city glows outside wide
glass windows. Kelly moves through sleek, book-filled
apartment, setting table. Jamie stands at counter uncorking
wine.

TRICIA JONES (51), sharp eyes, loose curls, all charm and
restless energy, stirs something on the stove. A cigarette
dangles unlit from her fingers.

TRICIA

You know what nobody ever gets right? Backstories. That's where the truth lives. Every line a person says — every choice — it's all backstory.

JAMIE

That's why your scripts make actors look smarter than they are.

TRICIA

(laughs)

Flattery and wine — a dangerous combo, Lawson.

Kelly sets down plates. Easy comfort between them feels earned — old laughter, old grief.

KELLY

Tricia builds characters like she's God on deadline.

TRICIA

(snickers)

God didn't have notes from a producer.

Jamie pours wine into three glasses, hands one to Tricia, one to Kelly.

JAMIE

To backstories, then.

They clink glasses.

CONTINUED:

They drink. A quiet settles in — rain whispering against the glass, city lights shimmering below.

TRICIA

I had this professor who said characters don't change — they just reveal who they always were.

JAMIE

Guess that makes me a slow reveal.

KELLY

Don't let him fool you. He was
already a movie star the first day
I met him. Just didn't have the
paycheck yet.

They all laugh. Tricia plates the shrimp and grits, carries
it to table.

TRICIA

So what's this mystery project you
two are cooking up in my kitchen?
Whispering like spies.

Kelly and Jamie exchange a glance.

KELLY

It's... complicated.

TRICIA

Aren't they all?

Jamie hesitates, then sets his wine glass down.

Tricia studies them, sees something serious beneath the
banter.

A beat. The warmth at table lingers, but something shifts –
heavier, realer.

Tricia sits, picking up fork.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Well, if you're planning to take
down a devil, at least eat first.
God hates martyrs on empty
stomachs.

Jamie grins, raising his glass again.

JAMIE

To full stomachs and unfinished
business.

They drink. Outside, thunder rolls far away – like an omen.

INT. KELLY AND TRICIA'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dinner's mostly eaten. The wine's low. Rain has stopped,
leaving the windows fogged and glistening.

Jamie lounges on couch, half-listening as Tricia talks — her energy still in full swing.

TRICIA

When I build a character, I always ask — what's their tell? Everyone's got one. A nervous tic, a favorite word, something they do without thinking. That's how you find the truth.

Kelly watches her, glass of wine in hand.

KELLY

Storm doesn't seem like the kind of guy who has tells.

TRICIA

Please. Everyone's human somewhere. You just have to dig into their backstory — find the crack. Wait, Storm? Storm who?

KELLY

Oops. Well, cats out of the bag, might as well tell her.

JAMIE

Settle in Tricia, even you couldn't write one this good...

LATER in evening, after much talking.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

You're saying... if we knew what he used to be, we could figure out how to reach him now.

TRICIA

Exactly. What he misses, what he regrets, what he can't resist. That's how you get them to open the door.

Kelly and Jamie exchange a long look — wheels turning.

KELLY

(quietly))

Maybe we've been thinking too current. His habits now — what if the key's who he was before he became Storm?

JAMIE

Backstory.

They both look at Tricia. She blinks, realizing she's just dropped something big.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Before the fame, he was what –
twenty-two? Guitarist in some
small-town bar band in Oklahoma?

JAMIE

Maybe someone from back then could
get close.

Kelly looks up.

KELLY

Or someone pretending to make a
documentary about those days. A
nostalgia hook. Artists love
nostalgia – it feels safe.

Jamie nods slowly, a spark in his eye.

JAMIE

An actor visiting another performer
to talk about art and truth. That I
can sell.

Tricia grins, proud.

They share a laugh, but Kelly's expression darkens – the
stakes settling in.

KELLY

It has to look real. One slip, and
he'll shut it all down.

Jamie raises his glass.

JAMIE

Then let's make it the performance
of a lifetime.

Thunder rumbles again, distant but steady – a rhythm that
feels like momentum.

CHAPTER 23 EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - NIGHT

Jamie exits Kelly and Tricia's building, collar up against
the drizzle. The city hums – taxis, sirens, laughter spilling
from bars. He scrolls for a ride, lost in thought.

INT. RIDESHARE - MOVING - NIGHT

Jamie stares out the window. Streetlights flash across his face in rhythmic intervals. The driver hums softly to the radio.

TRICIA (V.O.)
Every line a person says — every
choice — it's all backstory.

Jamie's reflection in the glass hardens.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. SOUTH SIDE CHICAGO - BASKETBALL COURT - DAY (YEARS AGO)

Sixteen-year-old JAMIE — lean, electric with promise — flies down the cracked asphalt court, sinks a jumper. His friends cheer. Music thumps from boombox.

Across the street, DEON (17), tough and twitchy, watches from a corner. He waves Jamie over.

DEON
Yo, superstar. You forget the rest
of us down here?

YOUNG JAMIE
Just tryna make it out, man. You
know how it is.

DEON
Yeah. We all tryin'. Some of us
just gotta use... different plays.

Young Jamie cautiously eyes a bulge under Deon's hoodie. They bump fists. Jamie jogs back to court.

CUT TO:

Jamie shooting hoops alone later — the sun dipping low. Distant GUNSHOTS echo. He freezes, ball rolling away.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Young Jamie sits under buzzing lights, hoodie up. He's been there a long time. Two DETECTIVES loom over him, all fake sympathy and quiet menace.

DETECTIVE #1

We know you were there, Jamie. We know you saw Deon.

YOUNG JAMIE

I didn't see nothin'.

DETECTIVE #2

C'mon. Help yourself out. You wanna play ball, right? College scouts? You think they take shooters? Or liars?

Jamie's leg bounces. Sweat beads.

DETECTIVE #1

You sign the statement, you walk. We'll make sure nobody digs around your name.

Jamie looks at the paper. His hand trembles. He signs. The pen scratches loud.

CUT TO:

INT. RIDESHARE - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

Jamie's eyes glisten in passing light. The car slows at red light. He exhales, haunted.

TRICIA (V.O.)

That's where the truth lives.

Jamie stares out at the wet city - older, famous, but still that tired sixteen-year-old kid.

CHAPTER 23 INT. Kelly'S OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Morning sunlight filters through half-closed blinds. Coffee cups, laptops, and scribbled notes cover the table. Kelly leans forward, focused. Jamie sits beside her, still tired from the night before. Across from them, Tricia paces, alive with energy - a woman in full creative mode.

TRICIA

Okay, so picture this - "How I Got Here." A redemption docuseries. Artists who hit rock bottom, found faith, therapy, whatever - and came back stronger. Think Springsteen meets rehab confessional.

JAMIE

And Storm's the first subject?

TRICIA

Storm is the series. Big name.
Messy story. America loves a
comeback. Especially if the sinner
cries on camera.

Jamie exchanges a look with Kelly — part admiration, part discomfort.

KELLY

You can make it look legit?

TRICIA

I am legit. I'll call in a favor —
maybe my old cinematographer from
Try Me Six Times, get a crew that's
small, quiet, real documentary
feel. Storm won't smell the setup.

Kelly leans back, skeptical but impressed.

KELLY

No one can know it's not a real
doc. Not your producers, not your
agent, not the damn caterer. This
isn't a screenplay — it's a setup.

TRICIA

Right. No one knows but us.

She smiles, a little too brightly.

JAMIE

And what's my part in this?

TRICIA

You stay away.

Jamie laughs dryly.

JAMIE

You really missed your calling in
espionage, Trish.

KELLY

(lowers voice))

We just need something — a glass, a
cup, a cigarette, hairbrush —
anything that can get tested.

Tricia's grin fades slightly.

Long silence. Jamie studies his hands.

Tricia nods, resolute now.

TRICIA

Okay. I'll draft the proposal, mock
up a treatment. We'll make it look
like Netflix already bit.

Kelly exhales — half victory, half dread.

KELLY

Welcome to the con.

The three sit in silence for a beat — the weight of the plan
settling between them. Outside, the Chicago skyline gleams.

INT. TRICIA AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Tricia sits at her laptop, typing furiously. Empty coffee
mugs, open notebooks, and half-eaten toast surround her. The
screen glows with a document titled:

"HOW I GOT HERE — A DOCUMENTARY SERIES CREATED BY TRICIA
JONES"

INSERT: The first line reads, "A raw exploration of
resilience, fame, and the ghosts that chase us home."

Kelly steps out of the bedroom, still in her robe, nursing
coffee.

KELLY

Been up all night?

TRICIA

You don't fake a pitch to Hollywood
half-assed.

KELLY

We're not selling it. We're just—

TRICIA

Making it believable. I know. But
believability takes craft.

She hits send on an email.

KELLY

Who'd you send it to?

TRICIA

Three producers I trust — enough to
make it look real, not enough to
ask questions.

Kelly sits across from her, scanning the screen.

KELLY

You really wrote Storm's name in
the deck?

TRICIA

We need bait. Nobody bites at a
hook labeled "TBD."

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - CHICAGO - LATER

Jamie lounges in a corner booth, laptop open, earbuds
dangling. His phone buzzes — a text from Tricia:

"Pitch is out."

He exhales, leans back.

INT. TRICIA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Tricia's phone rings. She snatches it up.

TRICIA (INTO PHONE)

Tell me you love it.

INTERCUT WITH: INT. LOS ANGELES OFFICE - DAY

A slick PRODUCER (40s) speaks over speakerphone, framed by
movie posters.

PRODUCER

I do, I do , I do. Especially the
title. "How I Got Here." Real soul
to it. You're pitching it as
unscripted?

TRICIA

Raw interviews. Confession-style.
Redemption arcs.

PRODUCER

And you think you can get Storm
Hudson?

TRICIA
We're in early talks. He's looking
for a way back. We can give him
one.

The producer nods, intrigued.

PRODUCER
You get him — we'll talk
distribution.

The call ends. Tricia sits there, breathless. Kelly appears
in doorway, watching her.

KELLY
They bought it.

TRICIA
They believed it.

KELLY
Now we need Storm to believe.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - EVENING

Jamie sits across from Kelly, reading the fake pitch deck.
Photos of broken microphones, rehab centers, and lonely
highways flash on her monitor.

JAMIE
It's good. Too good.

KELLY
That's the idea.

JAMIE
If Storm signs on, he's basically
walking into an ambush. And if he
doesn't bite?

Kelly hesitates.

KELLY
Then we find another way. But right
now, this is the only door left.

Jamie leans back, silent.

JAMIE
Guess it's time to knock.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

Storm Hudson sits at a long wooden table, scrolling through emails on a tablet. His hands tremble slightly. A mug of coffee sits nearby – black, untouched.

On the counter behind him: bottle of whiskey, half-hidden behind bag of coffee beans.

INT. STORM'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The place is immaculate, staged. A decorator's touch. Storm paces as he listens on speakerphone – his PUBLICIST, MARLA (40s, sharp, Hollywood-tough) rattles off details.

MARLA (O.S.)

You need this, Storm. People still like you, but they don't trust you. This series – it's not rehab fluff, it's legacy stuff. "How I Got Here." Brilliant title. They want to show your journey. Raw. Honest.

Storm rubs his temple, weary.

STORM

Raw and honest. Huh.

MARLA (O.S.)

It's Tricia Jones. She's respected. It's classy – awards-bait stuff. Not a tabloid sob story. She wrote that movie with Jamie Lawson.

STORM

The guy who tried to help out on the Edna case?

MARLA

Yup, that's the one.

Storm exhales – conflicted.

STORM

You think they'll buy me as a redemption arc?

MARLA (O.S.)

They already bought you as the villain. Time to flip the script.

Storm chuckles bitterly.

STORM

And what's the first question they'll ask? "How much did you drink?" or "How many women sued you before rehab?"

MARLA (O.S.)

No one wants the monster anymore, Storm. They want the man who beat him. You do this, you get back in rooms that matter again.

Storm walks to counter, stares at the hidden bottle of whiskey. Long pause.

STORM

What if I'm not that guy yet?

MARLA (O.S.)

Then fake it till you are.(beat)
Look, I'll set the call with Tricia's team for Thursday. Don't overthink it. Just smile. Be humble. Say you're working on yourself.

STORM

Sure. Working on myself.

He ends the call. Silence.

Storm opens cabinet — pulls out whiskey bottle. Turns it in his hand, studying it.

Unscrews the cap — hesitates — then pours just a finger into the coffee mug.

STORM (CONT'D)

One for the nerves.

He takes a sip. Eyes close.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is dim, fire in the stone hearth burning low. Storm sits alone at kitchen counter, half-drunk coffee cooling beside notebook filled with scratched-out lyrics.

Phone on counter buzzes. "UNKNOWN CALLER." He hesitates, then answers.

STORM

Yeah?

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Hudson? Sorry to call late.
Name's Warden Reese, Statesville
Correctional. You know a Raymond
McAlister?

Storm's eyes flicker — a ghost passes behind them.

STORM

I know him.

WARDEN REESE (O.S.)

He passed this morning. Overdose,
was sick with cancer. Wasn't much
anyone could do. I found your name
listed on his approved contact
sheet. You were the only one.

Storm leans back, hand tightening around phone.

STORM

He... he didn't leave a message or
anything?

WARDEN REESE (O.S.)

No message. Just a note for
property disposal. You want us to
send what's left?

STORM

No. No, that won't be necessary.

A pause.

WARDEN REESE (O.S.)

Alright then. Sorry for your loss.

Line clicks dead.

Storm sets phone down gently, staring at nothing. The fire
pops in background.

He exhales — long, heavy. Laughs once, quietly, a sound
that's almost a sob.

Pours himself a drink and downs it in one swallow.

STORM

Bye, bye ghosts.

Clock ticks. Outside, wind rattles the trees. Storm closes his eyes, faint smile.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

Hours later. Whiskey bottle's half gone. Storm paces living room, phone in hand, replaying Warden's call in mind.

Fire's out. Only light comes from a muted TV — an old concert of himself, ten years younger, singing to a packed arena.

YOUNG STORM (ON TV)
(singing))
"...AND THE TRUTH DON'T HIDE WHERE
THE WHISKEY BURNS..."

Storm stares at screen, transfixed. Then he hurls the remote — it hits the fireplace, cracking open.

STORM
You don't even sound like me
anymore.

Stumbles into kitchen, rummaging through drawers until he finds an old flip phone. Opens it — dead battery. Plugs it in. Waits.

The faint buzz of it powering on fills the room. He scrolls through old messages, stops on one from "Bones."

He opens it.

"You think they won't find out. You're wrong."

Storm slams phone shut, breathing hard.

STORM (CONT'D)
Dead men don't talk.

He paces again — then freezes. Outside the window, motion lights flare on.

Storm looks out into the darkness — nothing but rain-slick trees and his own reflection. Still, he kills the light and grabs a pistol from a drawer.

He edges toward window, heart pounding. Motion light clicks off. Just silence now — and his breathing.

He backs away slowly, pistol trembling in his hand.

Pours another drink, hands shaking so badly half of it spills. He doesn't wipe it up.

INT. STORM'S BEDROOM - LATER

Storm sits on bed, staring at phone on nightstand. It buzzes — just once — as if something inside it woke up.

He doesn't touch it. Just watches.

Then, quietly, he starts laughing again — the same low, broken laugh from before.

STORM
Dead men don't text.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

Morning sunlight slants through half-closed blinds, catching the haze of cigarette smoke and empty bottles. A knock rattles the door.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Storm? It's me — Taylor.

No answer.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

The front door creaks open. TAYLOR (30s, earnest, way overworked) and Marla (40s, Storm's publicist — polished, practiced) step inside. Both stop short.

MARLA
Jesus.

Empty glasses line the counter. A record spins, needle looping on static. The faint smell of burnt something.

TAYLOR
He was supposed to be at the studio
at nine.

Marla sighs, heels clicking as she moves deeper into the house.

MARLA
This is what "sober" looks like?

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Storm slumps on couch in yesterday's clothes. TV flickers soundlessly — footage of his younger self at award show.

MARLA

Well, the king still lives.

Storm looks up, blinking. Tries to smile, doesn't make it.

STORM

Didn't hear you come in.

MARLA

That's because you were dead to the world.

Taylor quietly gathers bottles off the table.

STORM

You two ever think about knocking?

MARLA

We did. Three times.

A tense silence. Marla softens, takes a seat across from him.

MARLA (CONT'D)

You okay? You missed a good PR window. That "How I Got Here" thing — they're waiting on your answer.

STORM

(snarling)

I said I'd think about it.

MARLA

Thinking time's over. You need a comeback, Storm. Rehab helped the headlines, but you vanish too long and you're just another washed-up addict with a microphone.

Storm rubs his temples, squinting through the light. Taylor brings him coffee. He waves it away.

STORM

Don't need saving. Not from you, not from some documentary.

Marla stands, walks toward window, surveying the massive property.

MARLA

People love a redemption story.
They eat it up. You play along,
smile for the cameras, and maybe –
maybe – we get your face back on
billboards.

Storm looks past her – into the reflection of the glass –
where his own hollow eyes stare back.

STORM

And if I don't?

MARLA

Then the only thing anyone
remembers about you is the mug
shots.

Silence.

Marla checks her watch.

MARLA (CONT'D)

Clean yourself up. I'll call them
back in two hours. (to Taylor) Make
sure he eats something.

She leaves, Taylor left behind. The door slams behind them.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Taylor lingers, awkward. Storm sits motionless.

TAYLOR

You want eggs or something?

Storm stares at cold coffee cup. Finally murmurs:

STORM

You ever see a dead man's phone
light up?

Taylor frowns, confused.

TAYLOR

What?

Storm forces a smile – too big, too fake.

STORM

Never mind.

He stands, shaky, and heads upstairs.

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Kelly, Tricia, and Jamie sit around a battered table. Shane stands near the door, hood up, scanning the room like a man always ready to leave.

On the whiteboard: "HOW I GOT HERE - EPISODE 1: STORM HUDSON" scrawled in thick marker. Under it, a messy bullet list: "Pitch. Trailer. Interview. Evidence?"

TRICIA

(whispering, excited)

We need to give him back the thing he misses - a sense of home. Make it safe enough for him to drop his guard.

JAMIE

If he's thinking "comeback," he'll play along. He wants control, and this gives him a controlled space.

SHANE

(arms folded)

He's guarded. He's got people around him. We can't just stroll a crew into his life and expect him to hand us a souvenir.

Jamie taps the whiteboard, thinking out loud.

JAMIE

What if we make the green room too good to pass up? Or a trailer, food he likes. Old records. A TV with his old concerts queued. Make him feel like he's back in the driver's seat.

Tricia lights up - she sees the scene.

TRICIA

Nice. Nostalgia bait. You give him comfort, he gives you conversation. He can't resist a perfectly staged memory lane.

Shane steps closer, practical, blunt.

SHANE

I've watched him long enough to know what he won't refuse. He drinks in private when he thinks no one's looking.

(MORE)

SHANE (CONT'D)
He freshens up before an
appearance. There are moments he
lets his guard down.

Kelly studies him — she knows the direction this is going.

Tricia crosses to a small props box, pulls out a cheap
toothbrush and tosses it on the table with a theatrical
flourish. Everyone goes still for a beat — the object simple,
absurd, and suddenly loaded.

Shane rubs his jaw, skeptical.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Leave enough a little liquor in the
trailer. Between takes, he goes to
trailer, drinks. We leave a
toothbrush and mouthwash in
bathroom. He'll use it to freshen
up before filming.

KELLY
But he's sober. Right?

Jamie looks at the toothbrush again, then at Shane.

JAMIE
I can live with the moral cost, if
the payout is freedom for a Grant.

Shane's eyes narrow. He exhales. Tricia nods, suddenly
solemn.

TRICIA
We stage it with care. The trailer
will be beautiful. We present it as
a perk — the ultimate green room.

Kelly writes the plan on the whiteboard.

KELLY
One rule: nobody leaks. Not to
press, not to friends.

They all look at each other — the quartet bound by purpose
and compromise.

Shane pulls his jacket on.

SHANE
I'll coordinate logistics. No
surprises.

Tricia smiles — half adrenaline, half fear.

TRICIA
I'll call my crew. Small, discreet.
We make it feel like his private
sanctuary.

Kelly nods once.

They file out toward the chaos of the set — determined,
uneasy.

EXT. COUNTRY FARM - MORNING

Wide open fields under hazy sunrise. Dew clings to grass. A
van kicks up gravel as it winds down dirt road toward small
farm surrounded by trees and split-rail fencing.

Storm steps out — sunglasses, denim jacket, and the faint
posture of someone trying to look steady. He squints into the
morning light, exhales slowly.

A production assistant, LUCY (mid-20s, calm but nervous),
rushes up with a clipboard and headset.

LUCY
Morning, Mr. Hudson. We've got your
trailer set up just over here.

Storm nods, follows her past trucks and scattered crew.
Chickens cluck nearby, pecking at feed.

EXT. TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

A gleaming luxury trailer sits by the barn, gleaming silver
in the sun. Lucy opens the door.

LUCY
Everything you might need's inside.
We'll be ready for you in about
fifteen.

Storm peers inside — spotless, stocked fridge, a soft couch,
ambient lighting. On a small table: a bottle of top-shelf
whiskey and two crystal tumblers.

He lingers on it a beat too long.

STORM
Nice setup.

LUCY
We try to make everyone
comfortable!

Storm smirks faintly – comfortable might be dangerous.

EXT. BARN - LATER

Storm, now mic'd up, strolls through the rustic set – a weathered barn with hay bales and cameras on sliders. The crew keeps their distance.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
So, Storm... what's it like starting
over?

STORM
(chuckles softly)
Starting over's easy. It's stopping
that's hard.

They keep walking. Chickens scatter in the background. A breeze rattles the tin roof.

EXT. FARM - LUNCHTIME

The crew breaks. Folding tables, paper plates, laughter. Storm sits off to the side, sunglasses back on. Lucy approaches with a tray.

LUCY
We've got lunch, sir. Chicken,
salad, or vegetarian.

STORM
Thanks, but I'll pass.

He nods politely, then heads back toward his trailer.

INT. STORM'S TRAILER - DAY

Storm steps inside, closes the door behind him. Silence.

He glances at the whiskey again. The light hits the glass, amber and alive. He sits on the couch, exhales hard.

He pours a small splash – stares at it. His hand trembles. Then, with sudden resolve, he puts the cap back on.

Storm stretches out on the couch. Within seconds, exhaustion wins. He drifts into a restless nap.

EXT. FARM - LATER

Storm's back under the lights, mid-interview. The tone has shifted — deeper now. The questions probe closer.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
You've been open about your
sobriety. How do you keep balance,
especially in a world that—

STORM
(interrupting, faint edge)
Balance is for people who have
something to lose.

A long pause. A chicken cackles somewhere off-camera. Crew members exchange glances.

INT. STORM'S TRAILER - AFTERNOON

Storm enters again. Slower this time. He shuts the door, leans against it — breath heavy, heartbeat audible.

His eyes the whiskey bottle.

STORM
(to himself)
Just one. For the nerves.

He uncaps it, pours a glass, downs half in one go. The relief hits immediately — shoulders drop. Two more shots follow.

Storm wanders toward the small bathroom. Looks at himself in the mirror — eyes bloodshot, face older than he remembers.

He exhales into his palm, smells his breath. Grimaces.

Notices the toothbrush by the sink — brand new, waiting.

He hesitates... then brushes his teeth. Rinses. Grabs a mini bottle of mouthwash, swishes, spits.

Looks up at his reflection again.

STORM (CONT'D)
Showtime.

He straightens his jacket, breath mint-clean, eyes glassy.

EXT. FARM - SUNSET

The crew resets cameras as the sky turns gold. Storm steps back out of the trailer, composure restored. To everyone else, he looks calm, ready.

Only Jamie, watching from a distance, catches the faint wobble in Storm's step.

INT. RENTED SUV - COUNTRY ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Golden light floods the windshield. Within sight distance from the farm, Jamie and Shane sit in a parked SUV, half-hidden behind a line of trees. The faint hum of insects fills the air. Shane has binoculars. Jamie scrolls his phone, nervous.

JAMIE

(quiet)

You sure this isn't... I don't know, entrapment or something?

SHANE

Entrapment's when you make a guy commit a crime. We're just... borrowing his spit.

Shane keeps scanning through binoculars. From their vantage point, the trailer gleams in the sun across the pasture.

A beat of silence.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Window's open. He's been in there awhile.

JAMIE

Think he took the bait?

SHANE

(smiles, dry)

He's got twelve-step slogans tattooed on his soul. But, put a bottle of whiskey in front of him long enough, he'll crack.

A pause. Jamie rubs his face - the weight pressing in.

JAMIE

You really think that DNA will tie him to Donna Workman?

SHANE

If Bones was telling the truth,
yeah. (pause) And if he wasn't,
we're all wasting our damn lives.

Jamie exhales, looks out the window at the farm — the crew wrapping up, Storm stepping out of the trailer, sunglasses on, a little too unsteady for someone sober.

JAMIE

He looks... different.

SHANE

Guilt'll do that. (grabs his phone)
Text from Kelly — she says the
lab's standing by. Soon as we have
it, overnight to Tulsa.

Jamie nods, still watching Storm in the distance — the country star smiling for the cameras, the very picture of redemption.

JAMIE

Man's about to be on every magazine
cover talking about second chances.
(beat) And we're about to bury him
with the truth.

Shane lowers the binoculars.

SHANE

Truth doesn't bury people. It just
shows where the bodies are.

They sit in silence, the sound of crickets rising as the sun sinks. Off in distance, the crew laughs — the day's shoot wrapping. Jamie closes his eyes.

INT. FORENSIC LAB - NIGHT

A low hum of refrigeration units. Fluorescent light washes everything in a pale, sleepless glow.

Rows of equipment line the counters — centrifuges, microscopes, sealed evidence bags. Kelly stands near the glass door, arms folded tight, watching a LAB TECH in scrubs move carefully between machines.

The LAB TECH, a focused woman in her forties, turns toward them, holding a sealed plastic bag containing the toothbrush.

LAB TECH
So this is the one?

KELLY
That's it. From the trailer, chain
of custody intact. Shane grabbed it
as soon as Storm left the set.
Storm was the only one in, only one
out. Airtight.

The tech nods, labels the bag, cuts it open with practiced
precision. Drops the toothbrush head into a small vial.

SHANE
How long you think?

LAB TECH
Depends. We've already got the
Workman sample pulled up — the
fingernail DNA. I can fast-track a
comparison. (pauses) You folks must
have friends in high places.

Kelly gives a tired smile.

The tech slides the vial into a machine — a soft whirl begins,
lights flicker.

SHANE
If it matches, Storm Hudson's got
more to worry about than a comeback
tour.

Kelly doesn't look away from the machine.

KELLY
And Grant Harjo goes home.

A heavy silence. The hum of the analyzer grows louder.

LAB TECH
(machine beeping)
Preliminary's running. Shouldn't be
long.

She steps away to the computer. The others hold their breath.

Close on: the monitor — digital bars and numbers scrolling. A
MATCH column flickers.

LAB TECH (CONT'D)
There it is. Same donor profile.
It's a match.

Kelly's hand flies to her mouth. She exhales shakily.

Shane just nods once, like a man who's seen this kind of truth before.

SHANE
(to himself)
Guess Bones wasn't lying.

KELLY
We'll need to confirm it
officially, double test it. But if
this holds... (beat) This changes
everything.

She looks out through the lab window — the city lights
blinking in the distance, cold and far away.

INT. STORM HUDSON'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Muted TV light flickers across room — an old performance of
The Secret Singer. Storm, unshaven, in sweatpants and a
designer robe, stares at his younger self belting out a song
with perfect control. The man on screen glows. The man on the
couch does not.

His PHONE BUZZES on the coffee table.

He hesitates, then answers.

STORM
Yeah?

MARLA (O.S.)
Hey, Storm. Just got off with the
producers from How I Got Here.
They're pushing the next shoot.
Couple of months at least.

Storm frowns, rubbing his temples.

STORM
Couple of months? We barely
started.

MARLA (O.S.)
Something about scheduling,
location issues — typical doc
stuff.

(MORE)

MARLA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Don't sweat it, we'll spin it like
they're "building anticipation."
Good for you, actually.

Storm's eyes flick to the half-empty bottle of bourbon on the table.

STORM
Right. Building anticipation.

MARLA (O.S.)
You okay? You sound tired.

STORM
Yeah, I'm fine. Just... thought they
liked what they saw.

MARLA (O.S.)
They did. You came off great, trust
me. Just take it easy for a bit.
Let people miss you.

Call ends.

Storm turns back to the TV — his old self mid-song, crowd
screaming. He can't watch. Turns it off.

He pours himself another drink. Hesitates. Then — downs it.

He stares at his reflection in the dark TV screen — just a
shadow of the man.

STORM
(quietly, to himself)
"Building anticipation," huh? Yeah.
Sure.

He sets the glass down hard, cracks open another bottle.

The camera lingers on him sitting there — surrounded by
trophies, gold records, and silence.

He pours again. And again.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

A knock at the front door. Persistent. Sharp.

Inside, the house is a wreck — clothes draped over chairs,
empty bottles on the counter, half-eaten food on the table.

Storm stirs awake on the couch, still dressed, face buried in a blanket. A faint TV infomercial drones in the background.

KNOCK KNOCK.

MARLA

Storm? You home?

Storm groans, rubs his face.

STORM

Yeah, yeah... hold on.

He stumbles to door, opens it. Marla, polished, clipboard in hand steps inside

Marla stops – taking in the smell of whiskey and stale air.

MARLA

Jesus, Storm. You living in here or surviving it?

Storm forces a grin.

STORM

Guess both.

Marla opens a window. The cold air rushes in.

MARLA

We've been calling for days. You didn't answer.

STORM

Phone died. Then I did.
Temporarily.

Marla moves toward the coffee table, eyes the empty bottles.

MARLA

You told me you were clean.

STORM

I was. Rehab worked fine – til life started up again.

Marla sighs, drops her clipboard on the table.

MARLA

You can't keep doing this. The doc delay isn't the end of the world. It's a blessing. Gives you time to clean up before cameras roll again.

Storm scoffs, moves toward the bar, starts pouring a drink.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Don't. Not in front of me.

He freezes for half a second. Then pours anyway.

STORM
You think anyone gives a shit? The world moved on. The show's dead. The label won't call me back. And that little rehab story? Didn't even trend a full day.

He downs the drink, steady hands, practiced.

MARLA
Should I... maybe call Dr. Feldman again?

Storm sends daggers her way.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Storm. You've still got fans. People who want to see you win. But if you keep hiding out here—

STORM (SNARLS)
I'm not hiding. I'm resting.

MARLA
You call this resting?

Storm slams the empty glass down. The sound echoes.

STORM (SOFTER)
You ever lose something you can't even name? You just wake up one day, and... whatever it was that made you you—it's gone.

Marla looks at him, pity edging into frustration.

MARLA
Then find it again. Before it kills you.

She gathers her things.

MARLA (CONT'D)
We'll check in next week. Get some air, Storm. Shower. Eat something that didn't come in a bottle.

Marla leaves.

Storm stands in doorway, watching car pull away down long drive. Looks at drink in hand — hesitates — then throws it against the wall.

The glass shatters. He breathes hard, alone again.

INT. NONPROFIT OFFICE - CHICAGO - NIGHT

Rain again. The same rhythm from earlier chapters — familiar, heavy, cleansing. A desk lamp burns low, casting long shadows over files, printouts, and half-empty coffee cups.

Kelly sits hunched over computer, scrolling through a forensic report. Shane stands near window, phone pressed to his ear, voice low.

SHANE (INTO PHONE)

Yeah. Chain of custody is clean.
Airtight.

He hangs up. Kelly looks up from report.

KELLY

That the lab again?

SHANE

They double-checked. The DNA under Donna Workman's fingernails matches Storm Hudson. (beat) There's no question anymore.

Kelly exhales slowly. The weight of it fills the room.

KELLY

Thirty-four years. One man rotting in prison, another living like a king.

SHANE

Until now.

He tosses a thin manila folder onto the desk — Grant Harjo - Case File.

Kelly flips it open — photos of the original crime scene, Donna's yearbook photo, Grant's mugshot.

KELLY

If we bring this to Hobson, it's gotta be air tight, or they'll bury us.

SHANE

We've been buried before. Difference is - this time, we've got a shovel.

Kelly looks at him. Half smile, half fear.

KELLY

And Grant? You really think this will get him out?

SHANE

It'll do more than that. It'll rewrite the whole damn story.

Shane walks over, drops into the chair across from her. They sit in silence a moment.

He leans back, exhales - then studies her.

SHANE (CONT'D)

You know what happens if this hits the press. You'll be the one who took down America's favorite country star.

KELLY

Good. Maybe they'll finally listen.

Lightning flashes through the window - white light across both of their faces.

Kelly closes the file. The choice is made.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Call Hobson. Tomorrow morning. If he won't listen quietly - we go loud.

Shane nods once.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Framed photos of Cal with sheriffs, politicians, and smiling juries line the walls. A gold plaque on his desk gleams under fluorescent light: CALVIN HOBSON - DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Kelly and Shane sit across from him, a manila folder between them. Cal opens it, flipping slowly through the lab report, photos, and signed affidavit from the forensic lab.

He stops at the DNA match report — Storm Hudson — Confirmed Sample Match to Victim Fingernail Scrapings: Donna Workman.

CAL
(skeptical)
You're telling me the DNA matches
Storm fucking Hudson? Seriously?
And let me guess, Garth Brooks is
his accomplice?

KELLY
The sample from Donna's
fingernails, found in Crosby's
shed. The lab confirmed the
results...

CAL
And how'd you come by Mr. Hudson's
DNA? (beat) I assume you didn't
just ask him nicely for it.

Shane leans forward, calm but steady.

SHANE
We obtained it through an indirect
collection method. It's clean. Lab
stands by the results.

Cal chuckles under his breath.

CAL
Clean. That's what everyone says
right before the story blows up in
their face. You understand who this
man is? He's not some drifter from
Muskogee. He's Storm Hudson.
Nashville royalty. Half this state
sings his songs.

KELLY
Til they hear he killed a woman.

Cal studies her. There's a flicker of something — not
disbelief, but calculation.

CAL
You've got conviction, Ms. Jones.
I'll give you that. But do you have
admissibility?

He taps the file.

CAL (CONT'D)

I can't use illegally obtained DNA.

KELLY

Grant Harjo has spent his life in prison for something Storm did. You can run your own tests. Pull Storm's DNA yourself.

CAL (SLOWLY)

And if I do — and it comes back the same — this doesn't end in a courtroom. It ends on the evening news. Country star. Murder cover-up. DA's office complicit. Every case I've ever touched gets dragged through the mud.

Kelly doesn't blink.

KELLY

Then maybe that's the price.

Silence. The ticking of a clock fills the room. Cal leans back in his chair, steepling his fingers.

CAL

Let me be clear — I'm not reopening a thirty-four-year-old homicide on the word of two crusaders with a lab report. But... (pauses) If I were to request a quiet confirmation, just for my own peace of mind, no one would have to know. Yet.

Shane and Kelly exchange a look — cautious optimism.

SHANE

We'll take that. Quiet works fine for us.

Cal stands, closing the folder. He looks out the window — the small city below.

CAL

You've just stirred up some ghosts. Either way, Nashville, and Edna, will never forgive you.

He turns back, eyes narrowing.

CAL (CONT'D)
I'll be in touch.

Kelly and Shane rise.

KELLY
We'll hold you to that.

They exit. Cal watches them go, then looks down at the file again — his thumb tapping the photo of Storm Hudson, smiling under stage lights.

CAL
(quietly)
Damn.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - STAFF CONFERENCE ROOM -
MORNING

A gray Oklahoma morning filters through the blinds. Styrofoam coffee cups, folders, and cold pastries litter long conference table.

Cal stands at the head — sleeves rolled up, tie loosened. His senior staff sit around the table: DEPUTY DA RACHEL LOPEZ (40s), sharp and loyal; INVESTIGATOR PETE HARLAND (60s), gruff and unfiltered; and ASSISTANT DA TYLER COOK (30s), young, ambitious, always two steps behind.

A tense silence as Cal flips through a file marked CONFIDENTIAL - WORKMAN CASE.

CAL
Alright, folks. I want thoughts.
We've got a potential match between
a thirty-four-year-old homicide
and... a celebrity with platinum
records. (beat) Let's assume, for
the sake of argument, the lab
didn't screw it up.

Rachel leans forward, all business.

RACHEL
We verify it. Quietly. If it's
true, we control the story before
someone else does.

TYLER
And if it's not?

CAL

Then it dies in this room.

Pete sips his coffee, eyes on Cal.

PETE

Only way to confirm is to get a fresh sample. (leans back) Court order's the cleanest path – warrants, chain of custody, all that jazz.

CAL

And the loudest path. Storm Hudson's got a team of lawyers and a PR army. The second we file paperwork, it leaks. (sighs) We'll have microphones in the lobby before the ink dries.

RACHEL

Could just ask him. Voluntary sample.

PETE

He's not giving it up without a fight. Especially if he's got something to hide.

RACHEL

What's the endgame, Cal? You planning to prosecute?

Cal stops pacing. The room quiets.

CAL

If he did it... (beat) We don't get to pick which killers we hold accountable.

Pete nods slowly. Rachel exchanges a glance with him – admiration and concern in equal measure.

PETE

Alright. I'll make some calls. Quiet ones. Let's see how close we can get without setting off the fireworks.

CAL

Good. And no paper trail yet. (looks around the room) If anyone leaks this, I'll personally draft their resignation letter.

He gathers the file, taps it once on the table — the sound sharp in the stillness.

CAL (CONT'D)

We play it smart. If Storm Hudson's clean, fine. If not — we're about to rewrite Oklahoma music history.

The staff exchange wary looks. Cal exits with the file under his arm, his face unreadable.

INT. STORM HUDSON'S COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

Quiet house, TV glows faintly in the background, looping an old music video of Storm in his prime. Storm slouches on the couch in a rumpled T-shirt and jeans, a bottle of whiskey between his knees.

The once-grand living room is dim, cluttered — empty glasses, scattered mail, an unopened guitar case in the corner.

He lifts the bottle, takes a long pull, then stares at the TV — at the smiling younger version of himself performing to a roaring crowd.

STORM

(to the screen, slurring)

You... had it all figured out, didn't you?

He laughs bitterly, grabs his phone from the coffee table. Scrolls through contacts. Stops on "Court." Hesitates. Then presses call.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

INT. COURTNEY'S APARTMENT - NEW YORK - NIGHT

Courtney, in pajamas, hair tied up, sits at her kitchen counter surrounded by open scripts and a half-eaten salad. The phone buzzes — she frowns when she sees the name.

COURTNEY

Storm?

STORM

Hey, Court. Long time.

COURTNEY

It's late. Are you okay?

STORM
Define "okay."

He laughs softly – a hollow sound. Takes another drink.

COURTNEY
You sound... (beat) Are you
drinking again?

STORM
That depends. Is it drinking if
it's the only thing keeping you
alive?

Courtney sighs, pinches the bridge of her nose.

COURTNEY
You shouldn't call me when you're
like this.

STORM
No, no. You're the only one I can
call when I'm like this. Always
were.

Silence. Only the faint hum of the refrigerator on her end
and the creak of Storm's rocking chair on his.

COURTNEY
What's going on, Storm?

STORM
You ever do something so bad... you
spend the rest of your life trying
to sing loud enough to drown it
out?

Courtney stiffens.

COURTNEY
Storm... what are you talking about?

He looks toward the darkened window – his reflection warped
in the glass.

STORM
Doesn't matter. (chokes up) Just...
if you see my name in the papers
again, don't believe the first
thing you read, okay?

COURTNEY
Storm—

He hangs up.

Courtney stares at her phone, unsettled.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Storm drops the phone onto the couch.

He finishes the bottle, sets it down with care. Then picks up his old guitar. Strums a few chords - shaky, uneven.

A half-forgotten melody fills the room. His voice cracks.

He stops playing. Stares at his trembling hands.

STORM
(quietly))
You can't drink it away forever.
(sings it)
YOU CAN'T DRINK IT AWAY FOREVER...

The phone buzzes on the couch, it's Courtney.

Storm lets it ring. Grabs his keys.

EXT. RURAL OKLAHOMA HIGHWAY - DAWN

Fog rolls low over the desolate stretch of road.

The twisted wreck of Storm's Jeep lies half-buried in a ditch, steam rising from the crumpled hood. Broken glass glints.

A SHERIFF'S CRUISER idles nearby, lights flashing slow. Paramedics work quickly.

PARAMEDIC (O.S.)
Pulse is weak but steady! Let's
move!

They lift Storm - unconscious, blood on his temple, mud streaked across his face - onto a stretcher.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A soft beep... beep... fills the quiet. Pale morning light filters through the blinds.

Storm lies in a hospital bed, IV in his arm, a bandage over his forehead. His hand twitches as he stirs.

His eyes blink open – disoriented.

He scans the room: sterile walls, a plastic water cup, a vase of cheap flowers from "The Secret Singer" production team.

STORM
(hoarse)
Where...

A NURSE appears at the door, clipboard in hand.

NURSE
Morning, Mr. Hudson. You're lucky
to be alive. Car rolled twice.

Storm groans, touching his head.

STORM
What happened to the Jeep?

NURSE
Totaled. You had a blood alcohol of
point one-eight. You're being
treated for a concussion and
dehydration. Broken ankle to boot.

She checks his IV. Storm looks down at the tube in his arm, then away – shame creeping in.

NURSE (CONT'D)
We contacted your publicist, Marla?
She's on her way.

Storm nods faintly, lost in thought.

He turns toward the window – looks out at the empty Oklahoma sky.

STORM
(softly))
Should've stayed down there.

He closes his eyes, breathing shallow. The heart monitor keeps its slow, steady rhythm – the only sign he's still hanging on.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - MORNING

Fluorescent light hums over stacks of case files and coffee-stained legal pads. Cal, eyes weary, stands at his office window overlooking downtown Edna

His phone buzzes. He answers, distracted.

CAL

Cal

DEPUTY (V.O.)

Morning, sir. You might want to hear this - Storm Hudson. The singer. He crashed his Jeep out near County 17. Lucky to be alive. Looks like he was drinking.

Cal straightens.

CAL

Jesus. He's still at Valley View?

DEPUTY (O.S.)

Yes, sir. Stable. They've got him under observation.

Cal pinches the bridge of his nose, thinking.

CAL

Alright. Thanks, Carl. Keep this quiet for now.

He hangs up, grabs his desk phone, and dials another number.

CAL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Mike.

MIKE (O.S.)

Morning, boss.

CAL

Storm Hudson just wrapped himself around a telephone pole. He's in the hospital - likely drunk. You know what that means.

MIKE (O.S.)

Blood draw.

CAL

Exactly. The hospital'll run it for alcohol, but we'll get a sample under evidentiary chain. Quietly. I want a copy sent to the state lab.

MIKE (O.S.)

For comparison to the Workman case?

CAL

You got it. This could finally break that wide open.

A pause.

MIKE (O.S.)

You want me to tell the hospital to hold the sample?

CAL

No. You get over there yourself. Sit on it. I don't want some intern leaking to TMZ before I've seen the report.

Cal looks out the window again — the morning sun rising over the courthouse.

CAL (CONT'D)

If we're right about him... the storm's just starting.

He hangs up. The phone sits heavy in his hand.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Rain clouds hang low over the city again. Kelly sits at her desk, scrolling through her phone. Across from her, Shane nurses a cup of coffee, eyes on a cluttered whiteboard filled with photos — Storm Hudson, Grant Harjo, maps, timelines.

Kelly's phone buzzes. She reads a text. Her face goes pale.

SHANE

What?

KELLY

(quietly)

Storm Hudson crashed his Jeep last night. Drunk. He's in the hospital.

Shane leans back, processing.

SHANE

Shit.

KELLY

Yeah.

Shane sets his mug down.

SHANE

They'll draw blood. Standard for a
DUI accident.

A beat. Kelly looks up. Their eyes meet.

KELLY

Which means...

SHANE

They'll have his DNA.

Silence. Just the hum of the city below. Shane stands,
pacing.

SHANE (CONT'D)

If the DA's office runs that
sample, they'll match it to what we
already have.

Kelly exhales, trying to stay composed. Kelly turns toward
the window, watching raindrops streak the glass.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cal, measured and weary, stands at his window staring out -
coffee growing cold on his desk.

His DEPUTY knocks, then steps in, holding a file.

DEPUTY

The lab report came in.

Cal doesn't turn right away. He already knows what it says.

CAL

(reading the air)
Storm Hudson.

The deputy nods and sets the file on the desk.

DEPUTY

It's a match. DNA from his hospital blood draw matches the sample from under Donna Workman's fingernails.

Cal lets out a long breath, rubs his temples.

CAL

Jesus.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

A closed-door meeting. Kelly, Shane, and Cal sit around a small table, the file open between them.

Kelly studies Cal, cautious but firm.

KELLY

So that's it. Grant Harjo didn't kill her.

CAL

No. He didn't.

SHANE

Then he walks.

Cal closes the file gently.

CAL

We'll file the motion to vacate by the end of the day. You'll get your hearing within forty-eight hours.

Kelly exhales - a small, quiet victory.

KELLY

Thank you, Cal.

Cal doesn't look at her. His jaw works tight.

CAL

I've still got a dead girl and a murderer who's been free for three decades. We have a lot of problems here. celebrity, decades after the fact, with a dead accomplice and half the evidence gone missing.

Kelly crosses her arms.

KELLY

Justice doesn't expire, Cal.

Cal looks up at her – frustrated, but not defensive.

CAL

Maybe not. But juries do. Memories do. And the world loves a redemption story more than a murder trial.

He closes the folder with finality.

CAL (CONT'D)

Grant walks free. But Storm Hudson... that's another question.

They sit in heavy silence.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A steady beep... beep... beep of a heart monitor. White ceiling. Harsh fluorescent light.

Storm blinks awake – his face bruised, IV in his arm, oxygen tube under his nose. His vision swims.

Turns his head. Through the half-open door, a POLICE OFFICER murmurs something to a NURSE at the desk. The nurse glances in, then looks away quickly.

Storm's breathing quickens. He knows.

STORM

(hoarse whisper)
...shit.

His eyes roll back for a moment – pain and panic mixing.

He forces himself upright, grimacing, every movement slow. He sees his jeans and boots folded neatly on a chair. His phone sits on the tray table beside a half-empty cup of water.

A shadow fills the doorway.

Jack Mack – slick suit, tie loose– steps inside.

JACK

Well... you look like hell, Storm.

Storm tries to focus, blinking through the haze.

STORM

You talked to 'em?

JACK (NODS)
Yeah. Cops are out there waiting
for the blood results. Don't have
to tell you what that means.

Storm lets out a dry, bitter laugh — instantly regrets it
from the pain.

STORM
They finally got me, huh?

Jack closes the door gently, walks to foot of bed.

JACK
Not yet. But it's coming. DNA
doesn't lie, and the DA's already
circling.

Storm stares up at ceiling. Tears well, but don't fall.

STORM
You remember what you told me at
your office. Don't pray, just
drink.

Jack doesn't answer.

STORM (CONT'D)
Didn't help much. And I even tried
praying.

Jack pulls up a chair, sits beside bed.

JACK
They're gonna want a statement. My
advice — you don't say a damn word.
Not one.

Storm nods weakly, still dazed.

STORM
What happens now?

JACK
Depends. They could hold off 'til
they've got lab confirmation. Or
they could arrest you right here,
while you're still pissing
morphine. The DUI is a given. The
murder...

Storm closes his eyes, takes a long, shuddering breath.

STORM

I'm so tired of running from that night.

Jack studies him — something almost like pity flickering across his face.

JACK

Then stop.

Storm opens his eyes. He looks broken, small — a man who once filled stadiums, now trapped in a hospital bed with nowhere left to go.

Outside, the police officer's radio crackles.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cal stands at the window, coffee in hand. Across from him sits Jack, gray suit, cowboy boots.

Neither man speaks for a beat. Old friends. Different sides of the same line.

CAL

You picked one hell of a time to come calling, Jack. My phone hasn't stopped since that blood test hit the lab. Reporters already sniffing around.

JACK

That's why I came. Before you start talking to cameras, talk to me.

Cal turns, sets his cup down, gestures for him to continue.

CAL

Alright. Let's hear it.

Jack leans forward, rests his forearms on the desk.

JACK

Storm Hudson didn't kill Donna Workman. Ray McAlister did. You've got the files. You know the man's history. Violence, drugs, laundry list of felony convictions. Manslaughter.

CAL

And yet, the DNA matches your boy.
Explain that to me.

JACK

She scratched him. When he tried
helping her. He was a kid, Cal.
Scared out of his goddamn mind. He
helped move the body because
McAlister put a gun to his head.

CAL

And kept running from this for
thirty-four years. Never really
found his conscience, eh?

Jack sighs, nodding – conceding the point.

JACK

I'm not saying he's innocent. I'm
saying he's not a murderer.

Cal circles the desk, standing over Jack now.

CAL

You know what this looks like to
the public? The rich, washed-up
country star gets a pass, while a
poor Native kid rotted in a cell
for half his life.

JACK

Grant Harjo's conviction is already
vacated. Justice caught up – just
took the long road.

CAL

And what about justice for her,
Jack? For Donna Workman? You
tellin' me I'm supposed to let
Storm Hudson walk into the sunset?

Jack leans back, calm but firm.

JACK

Statute's run on anything you could
charge him with. Accessory,
obstruction, tampering – all dead
by the clock. Unless you can prove
murder, and you can't.

Cal paces. The frustration builds under his calm exterior.

CAL

So what, he goes back to Nashville, cuts another record, does the redemption tour? "From sinner to saint - Storm Hudson live"?

JACK

Maybe. Or maybe he drinks himself into the grave before the tour even starts. But you and I both know - you don't get to prosecute regret.

Cal stops pacing. His anger fades into something else - weariness.

CAL

You always were too damn good at your job, Jack.

Jack gives a thin smile.

They sit in silence for a long moment. The clock ticks.

CAL (CONT'D)

You tell him this isn't over. He doesn't get to just disappear.

JACK

He already has.

Jack stands, puts on hat, and walks to door. Cal watches him go.

EXT. OKLAHOMA STATE PENITENTIARY - DAY

The massive steel gates CLANK open.

Grant steps out carrying a small box - his life in a cardboard box.

Waiting for him: Kelly, Shane, and Jamie.

Kelly holding her breath. Shane gives a small nod. Jamie's hands jammed in his pockets, emotion simmering behind restraint.

Grant stops in front of them.

KELLY

You're free, Grant.

Grant studies their faces.

GRANT

I guess so.

Kelly smiles faintly, blinking back tears.

They start walking toward the parking lot.

A few cars idle nearby – but no press, no noise. Just quiet footsteps and the sound of gravel crunching.

Then – the sudden ROAR of ENGINES.

A caravan of TV trucks bursts through the gates like a second storm. REPORTERS spill out, microphones raised, cameras rolling.

REPORTER (O.S.)

Grant, how does it feel to be a
free man? Do you have anything to
say to Donna Workman's family?

Kelly and Shane exchange a tense look – this wasn't supposed to happen.

Grant, though, doesn't flinch. He stands still, eyes clear, calm. Then he steps forward.

GRANT

I pray for them. Every day.

The reporters go silent.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I think about Donna Workman's
family more than I think about
myself. What happened to her – what
happened to me – it's a weight I'll
carry.

He looks to Kelly, Jamie, and Shane.

GRANT (CONT'D)

These people believed in me when
nobody else did. They gave me back
my name.

He takes a slow breath.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I don't know what comes next. I
just want to paint.

(MORE)

GRANT (CONT'D)

In there, all I had was pencil and paper. Out here... (small smile)

Cameras CLICK.

Kelly wipes her eyes. Jamie stares at the horizon.

Grant turns to them.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Let's go home.

They walk toward the car — past the cameras, past the noise — into the open road beyond the fence.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Muted light filters through beige curtains. A heart monitor BEEPS steadily. The TV on the wall flickers — sound low, but enough to hear.

Storm lies in the bed, pale and bandaged. A hospital gown, IV in his arm. His eyes half-open, unfocused.

On the TV — Grant Harjo, stepping out of prison. Surrounded by reporters.

REPORTER (ON TV)

— after twenty years, Grant Harjo walks free today, his conviction vacated after new DNA evidence cleared him of the murder of Donna Workman.

Storm blinks. The words sink in like shrapnel.

Grant's calm voice fills the room.

GRANT (ON TV)

I pray for her family every day.

Storm's hand trembles. He reaches for the remote, turning up the volume.

REPORTER (ON TV)

Sources say the DNA came from a hospital blood draw belonging to musician Storm Hudson, though no charges have been filed—

The words hit him. His breath catches.

STORM

Shit.

The nurse pokes her head in, startled.

NURSE

Mr. Hudson, are you alright?

He nods faintly – but his eyes are glassy, wild.

When she leaves, he looks back at the TV. Now it's showing Grant's face again – calm, free, clean.

He grabs the water cup on the tray and hurls it across the room. It crashes, plastic bouncing harmlessly.

He presses a hand over his face. The heart monitor speeds up – BEEP-BEEP-BEEP.

A long silence.

Finally, Storm sinks back into the pillow, staring at the ceiling. The TV plays on – Grant thanking his legal team, smiling faintly.

INT. NETFLIX CONFERENCE ROOM – LOS ANGELES – DAY

Modern glass walls. Minimalist decor. A skyline view that screams success.

Jamie sits at the head of the table – a touch older now. Three PRODUCERS in their 30s-40s sit around him, laptops open, the red Netflix logo glowing on a wall monitor.

A slide on the screen reads: "THE GRANT HARJO STORY – A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY."

PRODUCER #1

We've got clearance for the prison interviews, Kelly and Shane are both on board to consult. But if we want to make this pop – we need Storm Hudson.

PRODUCER #2

He's the white whale. Nobody's seen him in three years.

JAMIE

He's alive.

The room goes still.

PRODUCER #3
You've heard something?

JAMIE
A friend of mine says Storm's holed
up at his ranch outside Edna.
Stopped drinking.

PRODUCER #1
So what's the play?

Jamie looks out the window — L.A. sunlight reflecting off
glass towers.

JAMIE
I go to him.

PRODUCER #2
What, just show up?

JAMIE
No cameras. No crew. Not yet. Just
me and him. Two men talking.

A long beat. The producers exchange uneasy looks.

PRODUCER #3
You think he'll talk to you?

JAMIE
It's time.

Jamie stands, gathering his notes. His tone is quiet,
resolute.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
He's been living with the truth. I
know what that does to a man.

He shuts his laptop, ends the meeting.

EXT. EDNA ART FESTIVAL - DAY

Warm Oklahoma sunlight spills across rows of tents and hand-
painted signs. A brass band plays softly from a gazebo.
Children dart between booths clutching lemonade cups and
balloons.

Grant, in overalls, steady and clear-eyed, stands behind a small display of canvases – stark, vibrant portraits of fields, storms, and faces half in shadow. A handwritten sign reads:

"Grant Harjo - Mixed Media / Acrylic."

Locals drift by, pausing, admiring. Grant smiles easily – not performing, just *present*.

Across the crowd, Kelly appears – sunglasses, simple blouse, hair pulled back. She spots Grant's booth and smiles.

KELLY

You changed your style.

GRANT

You changed your hair.

They share a small, knowing smile.

KELLY

How's freedom treating you?

GRANT

Like an old dog. Took a while to trust it wasn't gonna bite.

She laughs softly. He gestures to the paintings.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Sold two this morning. A couple from Tulsa said they saw my story on the news. Guess I'm famous now.

KELLY

Careful – fame's a dangerous habit.

GRANT

Doesn't end well for some folks.

Sly smiles for both.

KELLY

You keeping busy? Seems so?

GRANT

Got a small place outside town.
Fixing it up. Painting.
(Motions, smiles)

She nods – proud, relieved.

GRANT (CONT'D)
(Quietly)
I got a letter last week...From
him.

KELLY
Storm?

He nods. Wind rustles the tent. Kelly waits – curious but cautious.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Can I ask what it said?

Grant studies her for a long moment. Then he shakes his head – gently.

GRANT
You could. But I think some words
only belong to the person they're
meant for.

Kelly considers that.

KELLY
Fair enough.

They stand together, watching the breeze lift one of Grant's canvases.

KELLY (CONT'D)
That one's my favorite.

GRANT
Mine too.

Silence. The brass band swells somewhere down the street.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - NIGHT

Folding chairs in a loose circle. A coffee urn hisses in corner. Paper cups. Bad fluorescent lighting.

The walls are lined with posters of hope – *"One Day at a Time," "Keep Coming Back."*

Storm sits halfway around the circle – older, leaner, clean-shaven but weathered. Swagger gone.

A small group of familiar faces occupy the chairs – actors, musicians, an ex-athlete.

The group leader, RITA (50s), a B-Level actress, soft-spoken but firm, nods toward him.

RITA

Storm, you been quiet a while. You wanna share tonight?

Storm exhales, rubs his palms together. He glances at the Styrofoam cup in his hand — black coffee, trembling slightly.

STORM

Yeah.

(beat)

Name's Storm. I'm an alcoholic.

GROUP

Hi, Storm.

He half smiles — still not used to hearing it back.

STORM

Used to be the loudest man in any room. Every story, every song, had my name on it. Then one day, the noise just... stopped. The phone stopped. Friends stopped. Hell, even the whiskey stopped working.

He looks down — a shaky laugh, no bitterness left.

STORM (CONT'D)

You spend long enough pretending to be somebody worth forgiving, you forget how to ask for it.

The group listens — quiet, respectful.

STORM (CONT'D)

I lost a lot. My music. My people. A woman I loved. A kid who didn't deserve what he got.

(beat)

But I'm still here. And for the first time in a long time... I'm not drinking about it.

He takes a small sip of coffee, hand steady now.

RITA

That's enough for today, Storm. Thank you.

Storm nods, eyes wet but calm. Applause — not loud, just sincere. Someone pats his shoulder.

EXT. LOS ANGELES AIRPORT - DAY

Jamie walks through the terminal, small carry-on in hand.

He pauses at the gate, staring out at the plane waiting on the tarmac — destination: Tulsa.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Flight 268 to Tulsa now boarding
all passengers.

Jamie exhales slowly, then boards.

EXT. OKLAHOMA COUNTRYSIDE - DUSK

A lone SUV hums down a narrow, empty road lined with bare trees. The sun bleeds out behind the hills.

A sign flashes by: EDNA CITY LIMITS. POP. 2,114.

Jamie grips the steering wheel tighter.

Ahead, the road winds toward a familiar silhouette — the Hudson ranch, isolated against the horizon.

EXT. STORM HUDSON'S RANCH - EDNA, OKLAHOMA - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun droops low behind the hills. A long gravel road stretches toward a weathered farmhouse and a distant barn.

Jamie's SUV crunches over gravel, dust swirling. He slows as he approaches a steel security gate.

He idles. A weathered intercom box mounted beside the gate.

Jamie rolls down the window, presses the button.

BUZZ.

JAMIE
Hey, uh... Storm? It's Jamie Lawson.

Static. Nothing.

He presses again.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
Just two minutes.

Jamie glances up at the ranch house — a distant speck through the trees.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
Just to talk. That's all.

Static again. Then the faint sound of a sigh — tired, resigned.

STORM (O.S.)
No cameras.

JAMIE
No cameras.

A low mechanical hum, gate creaks open, like a crypt.

Jamie exhales, rolls forward through the opening.

EXT. RANCH DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The SUV rolls up the long driveway, landscaping well manicured.

A lone dog barks somewhere in the distance.

Jamie parks, steps out. Wind whips his coat as he looks up at the house. Gets out, closes the door, and walks toward porch.

As he steps onto the creaking wood, the front door opens. Storm appears, looking fit and clean shaven in an Oklahoma Sooners t-shirt.

He studies Jamie in silence.

JAMIE
I'll tell you my secret, if you
tell me yours.

A flicker, maybe surprise. Storm opens the door wider, turns his back, and walks inside.

Jamie takes a breath, follows.

END

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