

5-2019

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Recommended Citation

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H.E.L.P:

A Creative Exercise in Feminism and the Buddy Comedy

By

Bayne Lutz

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation *summa cum laude*

University of Louisville

May, 2019

Introduction:

Earlier in my undergraduate career, I read Theodore Ward's *Big White Fog*. After Victor Mason uttered his last lines as a dying patriarch and Garveyite, I sat back and began to amass criticism based on what I called Ward's use of "exclusively allegorical roles for his characters." By this, I meant that none of the characters were fully developed human beings; they served as *representations* of common societal forces and movements, used by Ward to challenge existing methods of social progress for Black Americans. I was essentially following the work of Dossett (2009) in noting the symbolic function of different male characters. If Victor Mason was exclusively the Garveyite, Dan the capitalist, and Les the communist, what room did the characters have to explore complex relationships with each other—or using even a lower bar—talk with each other without proceeding to policy argument? I extended Dossett's argument by offering that this was a failure of Ward to properly nuance his characters. However, I thought later, perhaps this "failure of character" was completely necessary to his allegorical point. Could Ward productively discuss the different institutional philosophies by which Black American men might overcome their oppressors in drama without reducing them to those very philosophies? My answer upon reflection now is definitively "kinda." Victor Mason couldn't have a conversation about anything other than societal progress because that is all Ward *cared to explore* with the character. If Ward's purpose was to discuss those philosophies of progress, then he was successful. Maybe his characters lack productive nuance, but most likely, it didn't matter; they're more so walking ideologies than characters anyway.

When tossing around ideas in my head for this assignment, I debated how I would include some "academic material" by which I could justify writing a screenplay as a research-based assignment. I ultimately settled on backdropping the story with how different feminist

ideologies enacted social progress and how effective each method was, a debate which I was never able to settle in my undergraduate career. In this moment, my previous criticism of Ward returned. How would I create believable characters if they were only meant to evoke certain philosophies? Ah! The solution! I would just create *better characters*! I would not let them be one-dimensional dummies thrown in exclusively for my own philosophical purposes.

Such a solution is...more difficult to achieve than I initially imagined.

One of my favorite films of 2018 was Boots Riley's *Sorry to Bother You*, and even it wasn't immune to critics blasting it based on characters being representational rather than real. A review in *The Atlantic* noted in one instance that "Detroit [Tessa Thompson] is ill-served by Riley's script, existing primarily to explain the film's heavier themes" (Sims). Sound familiar? Other phrases used to describe the film say that it "tries to tackle too much" and that its metaphorical twist at the end was "too thuddingly obvious and impersonal" to truly succeed as a story. In other words, the metaphorical societal context it chose to discuss—that of capitalism and neoliberalism—eclipsed the storytelling itself. Yet, instead of concluding that Riley's script was a failure as I foolishly did with Ward, Sims concludes by noting *Sorry to Bother You* as a "unsubtle work for an unsubtle era." Following this logic, because we exist in a historical moment so obviously problematic and constantly debated, the film may need to get its harsh message across not just despite its lack of character depth or blatantly allegorical plotlines, but through them. I proceed through this draft of the screenplay with the assumption that characters may initially suffer a lack of depth due to my inclusion of them as sociopolitical tools, acknowledging that this is, at least, at first, necessary toward conveying the screenplay's argument. However, the screenplay will not stop at metaphor; it deals with ideas of social progress on a literal level in dialogue and action alike throughout, referencing the waves of

feminism and oppression alongside the curses and dumb jokes. Such a technique is critical in bringing discussion of feminism and social progress to the forefront of the screenplay. At the same time, I have no interest in purely educational work. Like all narratives, it attempts to relay a thematic message to its audience. This particular story follows a series of highly educated yet very confused (and hopefully, thereby relatable) murderers and murder victims, cops and criminals, postal workers and “mail people”, who grow to learn both that breaking the glass ceiling is borderline impossible, *and* that they should still value human relationships over progress if at all possible—at least, most of the time. It is not a new story by any means; it only tries to place a classic one over a fresh, blatantly sociopolitical context.

Before I delve into the meat of the screenplay to explore specific decisions I made in pursuit of an explicitly socio-political screenplay, I must first acknowledge that this version of the screenplay is *messy*. It is the second full-length draft of the project and will go through at least three more drafts in the process of improving for possible display in the future. This is to say that *H.E.L.P.* is not by any means perfect and that I proceed under the assumption that portions of the screenplay will inevitably be changed for the better given further discussion with my mentors and peers. I am a very inexperienced screenwriter, and thus, it may be a slow process toward achieving proficiency. It is especially useful to acknowledge that I am a heterosexual, white, middle-class, male writing a screenplay about women and their techniques of applying feminism in times of crises. I will make mistakes, but I am committed to honestly portraying these experiences to the best of my understanding. I welcome with my whole heart and pen the feedback and narratives of oppressed people into this creative work. It is only through hearing each other’s stories that we may grow.

The Screenplay

H.E.L.P. attempts to capture a critical question in practical feminist discourse, that of how to accomplish social progress. Specifically, female-identifying peoples in my screenplay struggle with how to overcome the gendered glass ceiling. My proposed options work similarly to *Big White Fog*, in which each character (or pair of characters) represents a possible way of achieving progress. Because the screenplay is a comedy, though, these methods are often taken to their extremes via satire. Each method of blasting through the glass ceiling varies by degree of success and morality, and I clearly recommend some methods more than others given which characters end up in jail in the final pages. But to be clear, I emphasize that none of these methods lead to being truly able to overcome oppression by themselves; combatting oppression is more complicated than any of the characters in the script realize, hence why no character manages to topple the patriarchy in the course of the film. I will now look at a few of the ways in which female characters attempt to break the glass ceiling and enact social change in *H.E.L.P.*

To begin, the H.E.L.P. (Heroines for the Elimination of Loathsome Professors) is dedicated to the most extreme form of enforced social progress, advocating for explicit violence (namely, murder) against oppressors. Instead of protesting or trying to change existing hegemonies, Waits and Susan advocate for tearing *individual* oppressors down to be replaced by feminist counterparts, hence the plan to install Alivia in Hughes's university position (19). This obviously exaggerated portrait is meant to satirize a segment of modern neoliberal feminism, that which ignores institutional problems and simply inserts women within problematic structures. Along with Wilkes, I note that neoliberal feminism often focuses in on an individualistic feminine iconography within popular culture and liberation through a reinvestment in capitalism. When walking through the H.E.L.P. headquarters, one notices the prevalence of paintings (14)

and archival material dedicated to female pop stars of wealth and female authors of high-regard (81), chairs horrifyingly shaped like female governmental leaders (17), an abundance of pink “pussy hats” (19), and pillows resembling the female anatomy (14). These are all items which disseminate ideas of either wealth, beauty, power, and female essentialism as that which the liberated woman should aspire to. Even though the organization claims to promote women’s autonomy and success, it only promotes an idealized form of woman—a successful, wealthy, intelligent, and most importantly, white woman. In this way, the H.E.L.P. takes women and *splices* them into institutions in the hope of disruption without trying to reform the institution itself, much like Wilkes’s characterization of the typical *Sex and the City* protagonist who “obscures the reality of women’s lives that are not structured by racial and economic privileges” (110). Perhaps the glass ceiling is broken, but what use does representation have when hegemony is maintained?

Scholarship generally agrees that Black individuals have fewer opportunities than White individuals in terms of occupational progress. Making sure to consider different types of jobs, research acknowledges that “Relative to Whites, [Blacks] have low rates of mobility, rely disproportionately on a circumscribed and formal mobility route...and gaps in these manifestations of racial inequity—based on income and supervisory authority—increase at higher occupational destinations” (Wilson, Peterson, Smith, Maume 92). While this study looked at White and Black male individuals, we can assume that a racial glass ceiling as they describe can be applied to women as well, assuming a compounding effect when combined with the gender glass ceiling. As such, when Mia wants to rise up within an occupation, she is forced to adopt a subtler form of feminism, one that allows her to make calculated decisions within the system in order to overturn it *gradually* without putting herself in risky situations as an ever-vulnerable

Black woman. She cannot afford to just murder men she wants to replace, lest she immediately be arrested or even murdered herself because of her identity. She can only hope to rise above them by planting herself within the institution—by relying on formal mobility routes—while simultaneously aspiring toward reform.

We first see this method at work when she takes action much more quickly than C.R. at Hughes's house, breaking down the door (12) and slicing open the package (16) without permission from her superior. While these actions may appear brash and immature at first glance, Mia is taking calculated risks to advance her position. If C.R. were to have found the body, there would be no way for her to leverage that into upward mobility within the existing institution's path to occupational progress. Without the ability to move up herself, she is forced to exploit C.R.'s privilege as a white man to further her own position. Notice that she does not instantly call the captain and ask whether they can have the Landson case; she persuades C.R. to do so with his access to privilege (29). She is using him as an ally without his own autonomous participation. This method of social progress only becomes morally problematic when she throws a potential ally in C.R. aside for her own individual success, in which she succumbs to the same power-hungry, success-driven ideals of the H.E.L.P and neoliberal feminism. She wants to solve the case (and thereby achieve "progress") before all else. It is only when she can communicate her experience with oppression to C.R. that she has the opportunity to rise within the institution without passing down exploitation and conforming to neoliberal feminism.

The case of my protagonist, Alivia Fournier, is more complicated, and frankly, in need of major revisions in the next draft. The premise for her character was in my plan for the screenplay in the first moments of its creation in September. If Character A were to murder Character B, upon which Character B came to haunt them as a ghost by some unknown phenomena, what

scenario could I imagine that has not yet been explored via the ghost story? Academia was familiar. Particularly, the successes and failures of feminist ideologies were of interest to me as an aspiring ally not sure how-to best support women, people of color, queer individuals, etc. Alivia eventually became a morally-ambiguous recent-PhD who engaged in murder to break the glass ceiling, one of the most radically “progressive” acts I could think of. What better way was there to explore the possibilities of feminism but within a confused practitioner of it? As I formulated the convoluted plot and rest of the characters, I essentially ignored Alivia with the thought that I knew her, that she was the backbone of the story and that I would just *figure it out*.

And yet, as I proceeded through the second draft in January, I realized that Alivia’s motivations were unclear. Why would she feel guilt almost immediately after buying into the H.E.L.P.’s neoliberal foolishness so completely? If she didn’t feel guilty, what scenes, set pieces, and conflicts would help her to realize that *murder* is not the best method to break the glass ceiling? I wasn’t sure. Nevertheless, I needed to continue my output of content, so she remained a mystery into the final version of the second draft. While she does complete a character arc in which she grows to become more honest, considerate of others, and cognizant of the negative effects of what she’s done, I realized in a time of reflection that her interaction with feminism was still indistinct. The sociopolitical situation which defines how the other women in the movie interact with the world did not define my protagonist. Alivia neither buys completely into the H.E.L.P.’s neoliberal nonsense nor Mia’s co-opting of another’s privilege to move up through structured boundaries. Perhaps she differs because she does not abide by a singular version of feminism. Or maybe I cannot decide what version she embodies because I have no idea which to advocate for myself. In any case, my being forced to articulate each character’s perspective in a scholarly context will result in a more complex and engaging narrative in its future iterations.

Conclusion:

To attempt to create a piece of fiction with a scholarly premise in mind remains one of the most difficult tasks I have attempted in my undergraduate career. To add to the typical screenwriting concerns of realistic characters and their dialogue, not over or under-writing action lines, and making sure the theme resonates with me as well as many audiences as possible, I was forced to reconcile with feminism in practical (even if silly) situations. Institutional vocabulary I once described as “too theoretical” to be applied to real-life scenarios became useful to describe the ways in which my characters interacted with a very odd version of Los Angeles in the screenplay. Without the tools, techniques, and vocabulary I acquired via the English, Sociology, Communications, and Humanities departments, truly understanding my characters would have been *impossible*. When people outside of the University of Louisville condescendingly ask how my undergraduate major choices helped me on my way toward becoming a professional screenwriter, I will point to this piece as evidence enough of the intersection in my thinking between creativity and critical thinking skills.

And with that?

I introduce you to...

H.E.L.P

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H.E.L.P

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v. 2

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FADE IN:

INT. INCREDIBLY FANCY, GOTHIC HOUSE - NIGHT

A MAN'S FACE. A thin gray beard leads up to a sharp nose and kind eyes behind black glasses.

This is HUGHES LANDSON in his early 50's. When he speaks, it's as if velvet itself is making conversation. He stares directly into the camera--

HUGHES

Good evening, my dear viewers. Today is April 9th, the second Saturday of the month, and I would love to invite you into my lovely life once again.

This is my--

(singing)

Hobby of the weeeeeeeek.

He adjusts his glasses. Pull out to see him in a black cardigan and **VELVET** pants, sitting on a **VELVET** chair.

He pulls a **BOOK** from a wicker basket below him and holds it up to the camera: *The Manly Art of Knitting*.

HUGHES (cont'd)

Knitting.

Melodramatic music **SWELLS** as we

BEGIN CREDITS.

Move around the rest of the house as if through the perspective of an impending **MONSTER**.

SLINKING through the **STUDY** to see **velvet** and lace everywhere--on a mahogany desk, the carpet, the curtains. Somewhere between distinguished and creepy.

LIGHTNING illuminates a **HALLWAY**.

THUNDER CRACKS! as we continue our prowl. Barely catch a glimpse of a framed photo--a **YOUNG GIRL**.

In the **LIVING ROOM--**

HUGHES (cont'd)

The ability of the needle to weave together my essence into a material product. By creating...

(MORE)

HUGHES (cont'd)
I turn my face from capitalism and
into self-productivity.

In the **LIBRARY**, SLIDE across a shelf to see several books in
a neat row.

MELODRAMATIC SOUND CUES as each book is revealed--

- 1) Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*
- 2) Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*
- 3) JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

Then, a CONFUSED, CARTOONISH SOUND CUE as we reveal--

Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge,
Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*.

HUGHES (cont'd)
I'm not sure why it must be "manly"
to be effective. Alas.

Enter the **KITCHEN** and survey like an animal hunting its
prey.

In the corner of the room, a set of KNIVES.

A GLOVED HAND SNATCHES a KNIFE.

CREDITS END.

Hughes is ranting--

HUGHES (cont'd)
Of course, if we were to use this as
a method by which we could--

A THUMPING from the KITCHEN stops Hughes for a beat. He
looks for the source but sees nothing.

HUGHES (cont'd)
A storm is not the optimal time to be
recording video, yes, but--

THUNDER. The lights go out. Darkness.

HUGHES (cont'd)
I'll just cut this section out. Where
did I put you, my beautiful wax
children?

We can vaguely make out Hughes's slender body in the shadows from LIGHTNING, but

Beside Hughes...

ANOTHER SHADOW.

The other figure approaches Hughes...

SLASHES Hughes's THROAT with the KNIFE.

He falls to the ground, clutching at his neck.

The shadowy figure DROPS the knife. Focus in on their hands SHAKING, moving up their body, but before the head...

CUT TO:

INT. MARIO VEGA'S VEGAN MEXICAN RESTAURANT - DAY

A WOMAN'S face. Just the eyes, a dark brown, nervously glancing around.

This is ALIVIA FOURNIER (20's, white). Wearing a yellow pocket-tee with KURT VONNEGUT'S face on the pocket.

DAD (O.S.)

Liv?

She snaps back into reality. On the other side of the table, her PARENTS, dressed in thick sweaters.

DAD

Ya know, you're about as tall as an anteater these days.

ALIVIA

Anteaters aren't really that tall. They're more...long.

DAD

Tall is just long in a different direction.

Alivia considers it for a beat. Looks back at the menu.

MOM

I don't know what the hell I'm gonna eat.

ALIVIA

How about the "Que-So What Are You Doing About the Environment?" for an appetizer?

DAD

Does that come with the "Chip In To save the whales" or do you have to order those separately?

Mom puts down her menu and looks directly at Alivia--

MOM

Have you found a job yet?

Uncomfortable silence. A MAIL TRUCK ominously looms in the background behind Alivia.

ALIVIA

It's not what I'd like to have but... It's in the service industry, just until I get on my feet.

DAD

Ya here that, hun? Our girl's gonna be a firefighter! A police man!

MOM

Well that's nice sweetie, but--

DAD

Nice? She's gonna fight fires! You know how well fires take a punch?

ALIVIA

Dad--

DAD

They don't flinch! Well, they're always flinching, makes 'em elusive.

ALIVIA

Dad!

Everyone STOPS.

ALIVIA (cont'd)

I'm a mail...person.

Mom looks DOWN, SHAKES her head.

DAD

Well you know what they say, ya can't
spell success without *suck!*

INT. MAIL TRUCK - DAY [DRIVING]

Alivia stares straight ahead, her hands tight on the wheel.

Beside her, JANICE (40's) has on bright, heavy makeup, and it works on her. She's constantly smiling.

JANICE

My fav is the "Enchi-lotta
gentrification." That sauce? Bro.

Alivia looks over halfheartedly.

JANICE (cont'd)

Ya know, speaking of that sauce--you
heard that new YG?

Alivia looks at Janice, BAFFLED.

JANICE (cont'd)

Turn left here.

Alivia SWERVES and narrowly avoids crashing into a TESLA,
but the DRIVER of the car doesn't flinch.

Alivia looks back at the Tesla but it isn't there.

INT. MAIL TRUCK - DAY

Alivia stares out the window at POURING rain.

JANICE

Well, damn, can't even see the house
in front of ya. These are the
conditions Mailedictorians thrive in.

Janice DRAMATICALLY opens her door and runs to the back.
Alivia SIGHS and opens her door much more slowly.

EXT. BEHIND THE MAIL TRUCK - DAY

Janice and Alivia stand in the rain under a tiny umbrella,
staring at SOMETHING within the truck.

ALIVIA
Is it heavy?

Janice SHRUGS, exposing Alivia briefly to a TORRENT of rain.

Alivia and Janice carry a MASSIVE box over their heads across the **YARD** to the house.

Alivia looks to the neighbor's yard to judge how far along they are, but it appears as if it *isn't raining* not 20 feet away, the rain ending at the property line.

Concerning.

EXT. FRONT PORCH OF AN INCREDIBLY FANCY, GOTHIC HOUSE - DAY

They arrive with the package and set in down under an awning. Wipe away rain from their eyes.

Alivia looks up to see a familiar demonic DOOR KNOCKER.

Her face goes WHITE.

JANICE
Jesus, girl, looks like you saw a ghost.

ALIVIA
We're at the right address?

JANICE
I mean, yeah. 341 East--

ALIVIA
Got it.

Alivia uses the knocker to RAP three times on the door.

No response.

JANICE
I got this.

Janice CRACKS her knuckles and dramatically...KNOCKS.

Nothing.

JANICE (cont'd)
Lesson 2. If we don't find a way to drop this big boy off, we gotta take it back to HQ.

Alivia suddenly perks up--

ALIVIA
Is there a backdoor? I can take it
back there and check if you wanna
just wait in the car?

Janice smiles.

JANICE
You're a god damn natural, kid.

ALIVIA
I'm an adult, but yeah, I got this,
go get you a power nap, girl.

INT. THE MAIL TRUCK - DAY

Alivia opens the door and climbs in. Janice, in the
passenger seat, opens one eye.

JANICE
They were out back?

ALIVIA
Yep! Signed and everything. Said,
that uh, she was napping the first
time. Woke her up.

JANICE
Name on the package was a male, Hugh
or something I think...

ALIVIA
Wife.

JANICE
Good call. Forget people can stand to
be just straight sometimes.

The truck starts.

From the house next door, out of a second floor window, a
NOSY NEIGHBOR WOMAN watches the mail truck pull off.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

A sunny day. Like, oppressively sunny.

A WOMAN on a bench in full noir outfit; the fedora, cigar,
sunglasses, a black suit, but bright PURPLE sneakers.

She could be a modern day Philip Marlowe, if she weren't a woman. Or black. So maybe not.

This is MIA WASHINGTON (20's).

MIA

(talks to herself)

The sun radiates on the ground where grass should be. But this isn't the place or the time for grass. This isn't a town of green, it's a town of black. Black and white.

A MAN is beside her in a COP UNIFORM that's ever-so-slightly too small for him. This is C.R. Barrett (40's).

C.R.

You summoning up a super smart white detective from the grave?

Mia stops. Looks over at him as if he's done this a thousand times before.

C.R.

We gotta head out.

MIA

I'll be a sec.

C.R. gets up and heads to the CA

Mia tips the fedora over face--

MIA (cont'd)

(to herself)

If I know anything, it's that people like me? We're special. Capable of anything, we're--fancy-talking white guys in fedoras.

She rolls her eyes, TOSSES the fedora into the dirt, and HOPS up to join C.R.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY [DRIVING]

C.R. drives down a curvy road with Mia in the passenger seat. She's now in normal cop attire.

They each drink GREEN SMOOTHIES.

C.R.
 (old-timey accent)
 Ya see, I thoughts we cops was
 supposed to eat donuts.

Mia CHUCKLES.

C.R. (cont'd)
 Don't believe everything ya's ever
 been told, sweetie. LA ain't the
 sunny paradise yous always heard
 about. It's a spooky-dooky Hellscape
 with big-ass waves and small-ass
 peoples.

Mia's phone RINGS. The caller ID reads "NONONONONONO"

MIA
 Oh my god.

C.R.
 Again?

Mia answers the phone.

MIA
 LAPD, what can I do for ya this time,
 Carol?

INT. NOSY NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - DAY

CAROL, the nosy neighbor, looks out her window at the
 INCREDIBLY FANCY, GOTHIC HOUSE.

CAROL
 I saw something...very, very unusual.

INTERCUT B/N MIA AND CAROL

MIA
 Oh?

CAROL
 My neighbor, Landson. Haven't seen
 him today.

MIA
 He might just be...taking a bath or
 working, or uh, things a normal
 person... might do? Its 11 AM.

CAROL.

No, no. He always goes for a walk at 9, and I didn't see him. But the kicker, ohhh, boy, here's the kicker. Mail truck came by, delivered a crazy massive package this morning. Took it around the back, put it inside the house, but I didn't see Hughes sign for it.

Mia looks at C.R. He MOUTHS 'No' but she grimaces.

MIA

We'll come check it out.

Mia hangs up.

Goes to take a drink out of her smoothie. C.R. looks at her and BRAKE CHECKS, spilling Mia's drink all over her.

Mia looks offended for a second, then punches him in the shoulder, and LAUGHS.

JANICE (PRE-LAP)

This is me.

INT. THE MAIL TRUCK - EVENING

Alivia stops to let Janice out, her fingers tapping on the wheel, looking ahead.

JANICE

You're getting better by the day, ya know?

Now paying attention--

ALIVIA

Oh, yeah....do you wanna, like, go to a bar and get a drink or something?

JANICE

Can't tonight. Gotta feed Lenny. He bites the boo when she tries. Maybe another night?

ALIVIA

Yeah...

Janice begins to climb out but hesitates.

JANICE
You know where to go in the morning
before ya pick me up?

ALIVIA
I...think so?

JANICE
If you forget--

Janice touches the SCREEN at the front of the mail truck and
it LIGHTS UP.

JANICE (cont'd)
This lil dude has got all your stuff
on it. Delivery locations, recipient
info, sender info. Everything. Cool?

ALIVIA
Cool.

JANICE
See you later, O-liv.

ALIVIA
It's actually with an A. A-livia.

Janice SNORTS.

JANICE
Yeah. And Janice is spelled with a G.

Janice throws up a PEACE SIGN and walks toward her house.

Alivia holds a business card up to the wheel. Stares at it.

It's labeled simply in yellow & purple--

THE H.E.L.P.

EXT. INCREDIBLY FANCY, GOTHIC HOUSE - EVENING

Mia and C.R. stand with Carol on the sidewalk, all looking
out at the HOUSE.

C.R.
We drive at lest four hours a day and
you are at least two of them.

CAROL
I swear there's something wrong.

MIA
You swore yesterday.

CAROL
Fuck. I swore just now too. What's it
matter?

AT THE BACK DOOR

C.R. knocks on the door.

MIA
She said the door was unlocked.

C.R.
We can't just enter without a permit.

MIA
Try it.

He turns the knob, but its locked. As he's turning--

C.R.
See? She's just bullshitting, we can
go.

Mia RUNS to the door and SLAMS into it, BREAKING IT OPEN and
stumbling into the house.

C.R. stands outside, mouth AGAPE.

C.R. (cont'd)
You can't just...Damn it.

INT. INCREDIBLY FANCY, GOTHIC HOUSE - EVENING

Mia methodically walks through the **KITCHEN**. The lights are
off but the velvet still seems to shine.

SNIFFS. Frowns. Something smells.

Creeps down a **HALLWAY**. Looks in the **STUDY** but nothing is
awry...

She enters the living room...

CUT TO:

C.R. enters the house. Looks around.

C.R.
Who even lives here, a vampire?
(MORE)

C.R. (cont'd)
(calling out)

Mia?

MIA (O.S.)
She was right this time.

C.R. runs to the sound of her voice, finding her in the **LIVING ROOM**.

She stands above the slumped and BLOODIED BODY of
Hughes Landson.

EXT. IN-N-OUT BURGER - DUSK

The iconic sign.

Behind the restaurant, Alivia stands in front of a brick wall overgrown with ivy. The business card in her hands.

ALIVIA
(under her breath)
There's a million empty buildings
here, and they had to go here.

A SHAKY BREATH OUT.

She walks up to the wall and grabs at a particularly long VINE. Looks down at the ground, then around.

No one watching.

YANKS the vine and FALLS down a HOLE that opens up in the ground.

A beat.

The hole CLOSES back.

The burger restaurant resumes its activities.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - DUSK

A distant SCREAM comes closer until WHAM!

Alivia FALLS down and lands in a sea of PILLOWS. Takes a second to catch her breath.

Picks up a pillow--they're all shaped like UTERUSES.

She looks up to see a METROPOLIS of white, fourth-wave feminism. PINK, everywhere. Women, some with cardigans, others with lab coats, but all with PUSSY HATS. Multiple stories high, impeccably clean.

Alivia gets up out of the pillows and wanders into the LOBBY. WOMEN pass her without stopping.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lights are flickering, making the pink walls look RED.

Alivia walks past a series of DOORS and FRAMED PORTRAITS of FAMOUS WOMEN. A hyper-realistic JOAN OF ARC next to an abstract OPRAH. All smiling, as if they're looking at her.

ALIVIA
Jesus Christ.

She stops with two doors on either side of her. Each door has a symbol on top telling you what it is: ELEPHANT on the left and SHARK on the right.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
I know it's one of these...

Alivia turns, OPENS the left door to see--

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - CLASSROOM

A FEMALE PROFESSOR (40s) lectures to 13 TEEN GIRLS. They all hold copies of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.

FEMALE PROFESSOR
Austen's prose uses *free indirect style*--who can define that for me?

13 hands SHOOT up. Alivia looks on in TERROR.

FEMALE PROFESSOR (cont'd)
Can I help you?

13 eager faces turn to face Alivia. They all wear the same uniform and have the same CREEPY-ASS SMILE.

Alivia SLAMS the door shut.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - HALLWAY

Leans against the door, stares at the one opposite her.

TESSA (PRE-LAP)
Do you have an appointment with Dr.
Waits?

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - RECEPTION AREA

TESSA (30s), confident and polite, the RECEPTIONIST, staring directly at Alivia from behind a DESK.

ALIVIA
At 8, yes. Alivia Fournier. With
Elisa--

TESSA
Ah! Ah! We don't speak Ms. Waits's
first name out of respect for her
feminine authority. If you'll just
sit, I'll check to see if Ms. Waits
is available.

Tessa has *perfect* teeth and damn, does that smile use 'em.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE GOTHIC HOUSE - THE FRONT PORCH - DUSK

C.R. sits on the STEPS, looking out at the palm trees and
ROAMING CHILDREN.

Mia walks up behind him, leans down, hand on his shoulder.

C.R.
(without turning)
How did you not scream when you saw
the body?

MIA
Can't say I've ever felt too bad to
see a white dude on the ground.

C.R. looks at her as if she stabbed him in the back.

MIA (cont'd)
It's a joke.

C.R. looks back at the street--

MIA (cont'd)
(smiling)
Kinda.

Mia stands. Walks to the MASSIVE BOX on the edge of the
porch. The PACKAGE.

MIA (cont'd)
See they brought this out.

Looks at C.R. He isn't paying attention. Takes out a GIRL SCOUT'S POCKET KNIFE.

C.R.
I know it worked out, and all, but you can't just be bursting in places without a warrant. We aren't the Super Troopers.

Mia almost has the box open--

C.R. (cont'd)
You ever seen-- Hey!

Mia looks into the box.

Her eyes don't show any emotion.

But her silence is evidence enough.

C.R. (cont'd)
What is it?

She kicks the box over and a LARGE PINK STUFFED ELEPHANT spills out. Beside it, a HEART-SHAPED CARD.

We can barely make out--

"Dearest Lucy, I regret that I cannot attend your fourth birthday party. Alas, I hope this elephant procures you my affection"

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - RECEPTION AREA

Alivia sits in the middle seat of three CHAIRS--all shaped and painted like RUTH BADER GINSBURG'S FACE.

Beyonce's *Single Ladies* plays in the b.g.

Alivia's foot TAP TAP TAPS on the floor.

Tessa SMILES at her.

Alivia eyes the door behind the desk.

A PAINTING of HILARY CLINTON stares at her from the far well.

She TURNS AWAY to find a REALISTIC STATUE of MARILYN MONROE gazing right at her.

TAP...

TAP...

TAP on the floor.

When she looks down at the floor, she notices its actually a blown-up picture of DOLLY PARTON.

Single Ladies is now in a minor key, and has slowed to a terrifying crawl.

Alivia looks back at Tessa, who is now in CLOWN MAKEUP, LAUGHING AT HER.

From below her, a VOICE--

RUTH BADER GINSBURG THE CHAIR
Why are you here, Alivia? You did the
job, sweetie.

Alivia JUMPS out of the RBG CHAIR

TESSA
Dr. Waits is ready for you.

Everything is back to normal. Alivia SWALLOWS.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - THE WAITS OFFICE

DR. ELISABETH WAITS (early 30s) is a dominating figure. Short, dark hair. PITCH BLACK EYES that are somehow still inviting.

WAITS
Sorry about Tessa. Still working on
her welcoming smile.

A SCOFF from the reception area is barely heard. Waits smiles, WHISPERS--

WAITS (cont'd)
*How did everything go, dear? Are we
ready to proceed?*

ALIVIA
Everything went fine. I'm just...
having some issues with the
reflective process? I--

WAITS

Liv, Liv. When I feel as if reflection isn't working as intended, I like to return to my feminist roots.

Waits grabs a BOBBLE-HEAD resembling Star Trek's UHURA.

WAITS (cont'd)

Are you familiar with Star Trek?

Alivia nods.

WAITS (cont'd)

The same Uhura came from the Swahili 'uhuru'. Do you know what it means?

ALIVIA

I was never that big of a--

WAITS

Freedom. Pure, unprimanded freedom. But did she ever truly have freedom?

Waits sits on the edge of her desk, way closer to Alivia than Alivia would prefer.

ALIVIA

I think I--

But Waits is already on her way to a point.

WAITS

No. She didn't. Admittedly, I couldn't stand to watch more than a few episodes, but Kirk, that...ass and his terrible decision-making skills. The excuses for William Shatner to be half-nude could...not be counted by a human being. I like to ask myself simply--what would Uhura do if she were in charge?

Alivia looks around the room, tries to find a way to get her off topic.

WAITS (cont'd)

I'm a big fan of treating your dreams as reality.

Waits notices Alivia not paying attention and SMILES, a TWINKLE in her dark eyes.

WAITS (cont'd)
 Have you ever been on a tour of the
 facility, Dr. Fournier?

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - VARIOUS

Alivia struggles to keep up with a fast-paced Waits while they walk across the massive **LOBBY**.

WAITS
 To your left, you'll notice the Ruth
 Bader Ginsburg Resume Center, for all
 our young trainees and newly
 prospering. We'll make sure you stop
 in before you submit.

BACK HALLWAY

Other H.E.L.P. WORKERS seem to STOP and STARE at Alivia. She tries to avoid eye contact.

WAITS (cont'd)
 Down and to your right is the Protest
 Pantry. Speaking of. Susan?

SUSAN (20's) DROPS down from the ceiling in front of them, catching Alivia off guard.

She wears her hair in a pony-tail, carries a clipboard. Like everyone else, she's SMILING, but hers seems natural.

SUSAN
 Yes?

WAITS
 Will you order more pussy hats? I
 believe we're out again.

SUSAN
 Of course. Anything else?

Waits SPEAKS but Alivia can't hear; she's focused on the CURVED KNIFE at Susan's belt.

She comes back to when Susan pulls herself back UP into the ceiling.

WAITS
 She's my...second-in-command, the
 Dick Cheney to my George Bush, if we
 were terrible white men. Ya know--

ALIVIA
Should I be seeing things?

WAITS
Hallucinations? You have, of course,
experienced some degree of trauma if
you haven't before experienced our
form of...social progress.

ALIVIA
But--

It's as if Waits accepts the challenge.

WAITS
My dear, my dear. You needn't worry--
he was a monster. A violent
misogynist. Typical, really.
Unwilling to take on female mentees
when prompted, refused to attend a
Women's March. He never published a
single piece of criticism concerning
people who weren't *white* and *male*.
Perhaps the worst part? My sources
tell me--

She leans in and *whispers*--

WAITS (cont'd)
He's a Jordan Peterson supporter.

Alivia GASPS! Waits starts walking again but Alivia
hesitates, puts her hands on her head.

WAITS (cont'd)
All across the facilities, we have
free sanitary products.

Waits stops, noticing Alivia still five feet back--

WAITS (cont'd)
Is there a problem, dear?

THE LIGHTS GO OUT.

A beat, then the lights come back on--**RED**.

Coming from a left turn ahead, Alivia watches a CROWD OF
WOMEN march toward them with HELMETS, KNIVES, and TORCHES.

CROWD OF WOMEN
 (chanting)
 No life without sacrifice! No life
 without sacrifice!

On the walls, smiling photos of female leaders are now...

ALL HILARY CLINTON.

Alivia desperately looks around for an EXIT--

WAITS
 (yelling)
 Alivia!

She finds it! STUMBLES into a SPRINT.

Looks back at Waits as she runs.

TERROR in her eyes.

Waits holds ONE HAND in the air and the lights COME BACK ON.

WAITS (cont'd)
 No life without sacrifice?

Susan appears next to her, surprising Waits.

SUSAN
 Will she be a problem?

Waits DRAMATICALLY considers it...

WAITS
 She'll be fine.

INT. THE MAIL TRUCK - NIGHT

Alivia was, in fact, not fine.

She drives like a demon on the interstate, despite the
 POURING RAIN and LIGHTNING.

She ZOOMS PAST--

a SEMI TRUCK...

a FERRARI...

a GOLF CART...

She DOUBLE-TAKES when she sees the golf cart and SPEEDS UP.

EXT. OUTSIDE ALIVIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Alivia half-jumps, half-falls out of the mail truck directly into a PUDDLE.

She looks UP as if to see God...but

a CRACK of LIGHTNING is the only response.

Stumbles to the front door, throws it open--

INT. ALIVIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A scruffy love-seat in the center of the small room. A smaller version of Rothko's *Blue, Green, and Brown* on the wall. A dying plant in the corner.

Loose papers flung around the room.

Alivia goes to a pile of papers in the CORNER and throws each aside until she finds THE PAPER.

INSERT: THE PAPER

A headshot of HUGHES LANDSON. His full name. A blueprint of his house, and shots of the various rooms...

BACK TO:

Alivia maintains a straight face as she reads.

The RAIN pounds on the roof, and LIGHTNING is near constant.

A CLAP of THUNDER rings out!

Alivia DROPS the paper, her hands SHAKE.

TEARS roll down her face.

And suddenly?

The rain STOPS. It's SILENT.

Alivia doesn't move. Looks up. Her face is red, wet.

Looks back down. From below her hands, trails of a watery MIST rise. Looks around.

From the ceiling, the floor, both sides, GHOSTLY STRANDS, all moving BEHIND HER.

She turns.

The strands meet to create a tall figure, the impression of a man gradually becoming real with each passing moment.

Alivia watches as the mist acquires a final form. Sitting on the couch is **THE GHOST OF HUGHES LANDSON**.

He looks at his hands, flexes his fingers.

Looks up to meet Alivia's horrified gaze.

HUGHES

If I may ask, what in the world is happening?

Alivia STARES at him.

ALIVIA

No.

HUGHES

No?

She stands.

ALIVIA

No.

Walks off, leaving Hughes just sitting on the couch.

HUGHES

Am I just supposed to stay here until you get back?

INT. ALIVIA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alivia shuts the door and locks it behind her. The room is dark and moody, lit by some string lights.

ALIVIA

There isn't a man in the living room.
No.

She walks to her bedside table and SNATCHES a PILL BOTTLE.

Throws two pills down her throat.

Slowly gets in bed.

Pulls the covers up.

Stares at her bedroom door.

HUGHES (O.S.)

Do you know anything about stitching
up a neck wound?

CUTS THE LIGHTS.

FADE IN:

INT. ALIVIA'S HOUSE - OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM - MORNING

Hughes stands outside her door, about to knock on the door, but he waits for a second.

Twirls a SMALL BLUE PEBBLE in his left hand.

HUGHES

(to himself)
Interesting.

KNOCKS.

Listens. Hears MOVEMENT from inside.

HUGHES (cont'd)

Excuse me? I promise I won't...haunt
you? I haven't brushed up on my ghost
stories since Henry James, is that
still what ghosts do?

A pause in the rustling.

The door is UNLOCKED from the inside. Hughes smiles.

HUGHES (cont'd)
 Now. I'm coming in. I don't want to intrude upon your privacy, but we are in extraordinary circumstances so--

He SWINGS open the door to see

Alivia STANDING ON THE BED with one half of a pair of a SCISSORS.

ALIVIA
 No.

THROWS the scissor half at him!

We track it ACROSS the room, toward a surprised HUGHES, but as it should PLUNGE into him, it goes straight through and STICKS into the wall behind him.

He looks at her. Then at the wall behind him. Back at her.

HUGHES
 I warned you I was coming in and you attempt to ninja star me?

She looks at the OPEN WINDOW to the left of her bed. Back at him.

He notices the DUFFLE BAG set beside her. Looks at the window.

HUGHES (cont'd)
 Don't you dare jump out that window.

ALIVIA
 I'm gonna jump out that window.

HUGHES
 Can't we talk?

ALIVIA
 We're talking right now.

HUGHES
 Talk about me. About this. Do you have something to be worried about?

ALIVIA
 I don't think we should be talking, but if we did, it should *definitely* be about me. You are just a manifestation of my psyche, after all.

HUGHES

I am *not*.

ALIVIA

You have anything better?

HUGHES

Perhaps I'm actually...alive and just in some incredible makeup.

ALIVIA

How did that blade just go right god damn through you then?

HUGHES

I study literature, not physics. I'm not the one to ask.

A beat.

Alivia throws the BAG and JUMPS out the WINDOW!

EXT. OUTSIDE ALIVIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Alivia HITS the ground and TUMBLES to a crouch.

Eyes the MAIL TRUCK ahead.

INT. ALIVIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Hughes CAREENS to the house's entrance, CRASHING into a side table before THROWING open the FRONT DOOR to see...

EXT. OUTSIDE ALIVIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

...Alivia about to climb into the mail truck. She FLIPS him off and CLIMBS IN.

STANDING IN THE DOORWAY

Hughes looks back to see the HALF SCISSOR still in the wall.

INT. THE MAIL TRUCK - MORNING [PARKED]

Alivia fumbles with the key, her hands SHAKING.

Hughes emerges from the house with the HALF-SCISSOR in hand.

Buckles her seat belt and SLAMS the gas pedal. The mail truck LURCHES forward toward the house.

ALIVIA
God fucking damn it.

She throws the stick into REVERSE and SWINGS wildly back in an arc, CRASHING into the corner of her house.

Looks out the window for Hughes but can't see him anywhere.

BACK into DRIVE and

SCREEEEEEECHES out to the road!

INT. THE MAIL TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER [DRIVING]

Her hands GRIP as tightly as possible on the wheel. Looks longingly at the house in the rear-view mirror. Spots Hughes walking toward the road in her yard.

ALIVIA
Let's see you talk to me now,
motherfucker.

Suddenly, a LOUD POP!

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP on the right side of the truck.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
Fuck.

She pulls off to the side of the road. Looks back through the mirror. Hughes is just close enough for Alivia to see his SMILE.

INT. IN-N-OUT BURGER - DAY

CLOSEUP of a BURGER in all its glory.

Look up to see Mia staring at it from across the table in HORROR. A strawberry milkshake in her hand.

C.R. talks through messy bites of the burger--

C.R.
Traffic duty later, ya know. Crazy bastards on the 405 have it comin'.

Mia is still staring at the burger.

C.R. (cont'd)

Mia!

She SHAKES it off, looks up at him.

C.R. (cont'd)

(offering the burger)

You know you can have some if you want.

She SNARLS at the suggestion.

C.R. (cont'd)

The cows aren't gonna come for vengeance or anything.

MIA

Question.

C.R.

If you want to hold the speed gun, you can just take it, you don't have to ask.

MIA

(takes a sip)

We have the case or no?

He STOPS half-way through a bite.

C.R.

I mean...probably not, right? We aren't really qualified and I'd have to ask him and he probably hasn't had lunch yet, and--

MIA

Call him now.

C.R.

Mia, you just don't call the man without his lunch.

She slides in the booth next to him, punches him in the arm.

MIA

C'mon.

He rolls his eyes. He goes to take a bite and when he isn't looking, she SNATCHES the phone, dials in the number and CALLS.

SPLIT SCREEN.

On the left, the CAPTAIN and a professional-looking LATINO MAN IN CUFFS.

On the right, Mia and C.R. leaning into the phone.

C.R.

Cap?

The captain is small and thin, with the thick mustache of a much broader man.

CAPTAIN

What'd'ya want, Carl?

C.R.

I go by C.R. now, if you remem--

Mia STARES at him.

C.R. (cont'd)

Say, can I ask you a question?

CAPTAIN

One sec.

(to the Latino man)

DID YOU OR DID YOU NOT COME TO THIS COUNTRY ILLEGALLY, RAT?

LATINO MAN

(with NO accent)

I'm from Milwaukee.

CAPTAIN

AHA!

Mia and C.R. exchange a confused glance.

MIA

(whisper)

What a pig.

C.R.

Such a pig.

CAPTAIN

What?

C.R.

I just wondered--

Mia SNATCHES the phone.

MIA
Can we have the Landson case?

The captain leans in TOO CLOSE to the Latino man's face.

CAPTAIN
I'm gonna take you down and ship you
back to wherever the fuck *Muh-wah-kee*
is.

LATINO MAN
It's in Wisconsin.

The captain raises the phone to his ear. He's maybe 3 inches
from the Latino Man's face.

CAPTAIN
Do whatever the fuck you want. I have
something to take care of.

He hangs up.

CAPTAIN (cont'd)
Why are you even here, scum?

LATINO MAN
I go to UCLA.

END SPLIT SCREEN.

Mia goes for a KNUCKLE BUMP but C.R. SLAPS it like a HIGH-
FIVE. She SNORTS and smiles.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A hyper-realistic painting of Virginia Woolf.

She doesn't look pleased to have been painted.

SUSAN (O.S.)
Call to order the fifteenth meeting
of the Committee of Reasonable
Negotiations.

A large, central, rectangular wooden table. 12 WHITE WOMEN
sit around it. WAITS sits at the head of the table, SUSAN to
her right.

On the walls, various unflattering paintings of Virginia
Woolf.

SUSAN

We have called this meeting to address a new initiative, but first, this week's statistics.

Waits nods. Susan pulls out a REMOTE CONTROL, which she points toward the far wall and presses a button.

Nothing happens. Frowns. Presses it with more force.

Waits TAPS her fingers on the table. All the women stare at Susan. Susan continues pressing buttons. Panicking.

The projector turns on.

All the women except Waits SIGH in relief.

Suddenly, the projector FIZZLES, SPARKS, and DIES.

The women turn to stare at Waits.

Waits pulls out a SECOND REMOTE, and presses a button. A SECOND PROJECTOR descends from the ceiling!

The women CHEER! Waits waves them off.

Susan FROWNS.

SUSAN (cont'd)

We're up to 52% assistants, 45 Associate, 33 Full.

The women look disappointed.

WAITS

That is, however, a 12% difference across the board since we began, eh?

Smiles all around.

DR. WAITS

Thank you, Susan. Now, the Paltrow Project. I have previously brought to the attention of the committee the pseudo-scientific, nonsensical--

SUSAN

Have we heard anything about Dr. Fournier?

A challenge.

The women avoid eye contact. Waits gives the side eye to Susan, presses a button.

On the far wall, we now see a MAP of Los Angeles. A stationary dot somewhere in Westwood.

Then, to a CAMERA FEED showing Alivia's mangled HOUSE.

WAITS

As you can very well see, Dr. Fournier has fled her home and is driving...somewhere. Most likely to Portland, like the other defectors.

The women all SHUDDER in disgust at Portland.

WAITS (cont'd)

And I had such high hopes for her. Alas, we'll have another candidate for her opening soon enough.

SUSAN

And we're sure that she's not a threat?

WAITS (PRE-LAP)

In zero way is she any kind of threat to us. Now.

The screen now displays an image of GWYNETH PALTROW'S FACE with a RED X over it.

WAITS

GOOP.

EXT. JANICE'S FRONT PORCH - DAY

Janice sits on the front steps, chin in her hand. Her wife leans out of the front door.

JANICE'S WIFE

Hun? It's been hours, I don't think she's coming.

Janice just stares out. Her wife comes behind her and kisses her on the cheek.

JANICE'S WIFE (cont'd)

I'll drive ya.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MAIL TRUCK - THE STREET - DAY

Alivia sits against her front left tire. A sticker of Janice's FACE with a WIDE SMILE next to her head.

Leans up and stares at its counterpart in the back, FLAT as can be.

On her right side, Hughes sits next to her, tossing the pebble in the air and catching it.

A MUFFLED TRAP SONG from below. Hughes looks over at her.

HUGHES

You should answer that.

ALIVIA

Yea? You should fuck off.

HUGHES

(under his breath)

Not particularly necessary, but understandable.

She goes to pick up the phone, but the ringtone stops. She looks at it.

Missed Call: Janice (14)

ALIVIA

Christ on a cricket, Jan, it's been two hours.

HUGHES

She's probably concerned about you.

ALIVIA

I'm concerned about me. And when the fuck you're going to disappear.

HUGHES

Is it *that* necessary for you to keep cursing at me?

ALIVIA

I was hoping the sleep would work.... you would just *poof*.

HUGHES

Like one of those terrible pictures where it was all but a dream.

ALIVIA

Look. If *I'm* gonna get through this, I'm gonna need you to stop talking like you're James Fucking Joyce. It's 2019, call it a movie, or at least a be normal pretentious and call it a *film*.

A CAR passes them on the left. Alivia pauses, turns to look at the road behind them. Hughes smiles--

HUGHES

(awkwardly)

You gots a plan, girl?

She looks back at him with a kind of...disgusted confusion at his new choice of language.

ALIVIA

Can you promise me something?

HUGHES

Don't do that again?

ALIVIA

Please.

A beat.

ALIVIA (cont'd)

You happen to know anything about how to jack--oh, sorry--*purloin* a car?

HUGHES

If I'm you, how could I?

ALIVIA

Touche.

INT. MASSIVE STORE PARKING LOT - MORNING

Mia surveys, hands on her hips.

C.R. beside her, eating a SUGARY DOUGHNUT. Mia looks over at him with a kinda disgusted face.

C.R.

(through a bite)

It was a matter of time, okay? This the place?

MIA
You can read.

INSERT: *Bobby Blue's Velvet & More Sign.*

A bell RINGS.

INT. BOBBY BLUE'S VELVET & MORE - MORNING

Mia and C.R. at a rectangular counter in the middle of the store. Around them, racks upon racks of velvet. Shelves made of velvet. The items on them made of velvet.

Clothing, furniture, car accessories. Velvet.

C.R.
Maybe they aren't open, we should go
patrol or...

The VELVET CLERK (20's, Black woman) POPS UP out of nowhere. From below the counter, maybe... Mia raises one eyebrow.

VELVET CLERK
Beginning velveteers?

Mia and C.R. exchange a knowing glance.

MIA
(flashing her badge)
Just stopping by, wanted to ask a few
questions.

VELVET CLERK
Fire away! But, like, please don't,
velvet is very sensitive to bullets.

Mia opens her mouth to speak but--

C.R.
You get any unusual characters in
here ever? Lookin' suspicious,
suspiciously lookin'?

The velvet clerk looks for a beat...then starts CACKLING.

VELVET CLERK
We...holdup. Damn. I can't--every
customer we have is a god damn
weirdo, y'all don't even know.

A BALDING MAN WITH BUSHY MUSTACHE approaches the counter.

BALDING MAN

Do you all have any velvet lingerie
for men that'll impress Japanese
girls?

VELVET CLERK

Aisle 6.

MIA

Women. Japanese WOMEN.

VELVET CLERK

What kinda weirdos y'all looking for?

MIA

It's more like who...doesn't belong?
Anybody that seemed nervous, like...a
normal person, maybe?

VELVET CLERK

Let me ask my manager.

The MANAGER pops up from behind the counter.

The cops double-take. Mia leans to look behind the counter--

MANAGER

Nope. Just the usual unusuals. I can
ask the owner though?

The OWNER pops up. Shakes C.R.'s hand. Mia ROLLS HER EYES.

OWNER

Hi there! I haven't seen anything out
of the odd ordinaries. I could
contact the CEO if you--

MIA

That won't be necces--

A TAP on Mia's shoulder. She turns to see the CEO.

CEO

I actually noticed a young woman in
the store the other day. We don't get
many women under 60, so it was a bit
of surprise.

C.R.

Were you able to get any surveillance
footage? Or could you describe the
customer while we draw a generally
inaccurate portrait of her?

The CEO hands him a POLAROID photo. It's slightly blurry, as if the photographer was taking it while running away...We can still make out the figure: ALIVIA.

CEO
We take pictures of all our customers
while they shop, for their own
safety.

Mia and C.R. exchange a CONCERNED GLANCE.

MIA
Thank you, and--

C.R.
Keep an eye out for me.

Mia glares at C.R for interrupting her, but he doesn't notice.

The clerk, manager, owner, and CEO wave IN SYNC as Mia half-DRAGS C.R. toward the door.

INT. YELLOW VW BUG - DAY [DRIVING]

TONY HALE takes off his sunglasses to reveal incredibly drowsy eyes.

Yes, the real Tony Hale.

He looks to the road in front of him and SQUINTS.

A woman stands with her THUMB UP. Beside her, a MAIL TRUCK with a flat tire.

Looks at his watch. SHRUGS.

He decides to be helpful, and PULLS OFF to the side.

Maybe not the best day to be nice, Tony.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MAIL TRUCK - THE STREET - DAY

ALIVIA
Lit. Oh--punch buggy,

She tries to PUNCH Hughes in the arm but it passes RIGHT THROUGH HIM, and she kinda just...falls over.

He CHUCKLES.

HUGHES

If ya haven't figured it out yet, I can touch things--but they can't touch me.

ALIVIA

That doesn't make any sense, but sure. Stupid brain.

Tony opens the car door and walks toward them--

HUGHES

You have a plan?

ALIVIA

A plan...Let's see. If I can try and distract him with my feminine charm...

He walks off, but Alivia doesn't notice.

ALIVIA (cont'd)

...you could--

Looks to him and notices him hiding behind the hood of the mail truck.

ALIVIA (cont'd)

He can't even fucking see you, you idiot--

TONY

You stranded?

ALIVIA

No. I mean. Yes. Flat tire, I'm afraid. We gotta get to a conference, and we're already late and--

TONY

We?

Hughes looks on from **BEHIND THE TRUCK**.

Feels a sudden PANG in his stomach and doubles over. Lifts up his shirt to see a GAPING HOLE where his belly button should be.

PULLS his shirt back down. Crouches down and moves out from behind the truck...

BACK TO ALIVIA

She tries to flirtily touch Tony on the arm but her hand just kind of...RESTS on his forearm. He looks uncomfortable.

TONY (cont'd)
You don't have to, do that, or anything, I don't mind...

Hughes is directly behind Tony now.

ALIVIA
It's fine, I can...you know, if you want...

Reaches his hand out for Tony's back pocket, where his KEYS stick out...

Tony's phone DINGS right as Hughes gets his FINGERS around the keys. Hughes BACKS UP SLOWLY.

Alivia takes her hand back.

Tony checks his phone and LAUGHS.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
You get a meme, or...?

TONY
Heh, no. Jessica Walter is such a dog, I just...

He finishes texting back and looks back up--

TONY (cont'd)
I'm on my way to a job, but I've got hookups with the po-po, so they'll just zip ya right to the conference, no biggie.

Alivia's eyes WIDEN as he types

9 1 1

He puts the phone to his ear and SMILES at Alivia.

*When he does this, Alivia sees a kind of **FLASHBACK** on top of reality, and Tessa's **TERRIFYING SMILE** is **SUPERIMPOSED ON TOP OF TONY'S GENUINE SMILE**. Tessa LAUGHS an **EVIL LAUGH** as she holds the phone up to her ear.*

BACK TO REALITY

TONY (cont'd)
Officer? Yes, I just came upon a
young woman stranded and--

Alivia SLAPS the phone out of his hand.

A beat while they just...

Stare at each other.

TONY (cont'd)
I'm just gonna...pick this up...

He leans down to pick up his phone while maintaining eye
contact. As he comes back up...

Hughes SQUEEZES a NERVE in Tony's shoulder. Tony SLUMPS to
the ground in a pile.

Hughes looks at Alivia and SMILES.

HUGHES
So....

ALIVIA
...So, I guess you're real.

HUGHES
Interesting choice you've come upon,
now--

He holds up the keys--

HUGHES (cont'd)
Are we ready to acknowledge what *this*
is and proceed with the kidnapping
we've now started?

Alivia nods reluctantly.

INT. LARGE POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

C.R. holds his phone to his ear--

C.R.
Tony? Tone? Everything alright?

The call ENDS. C.R. puts the phone down.

C.R. (cont'd)
Hope Hale's okay. Never know these
days.

PULL OUT to see Mia, Janice, and Alivia's parents all staring at Hughes.

MIA
You wanna...get back to it?

C.R.
(embarrassed)
You can go ahead.

DAD
(holding back tears)
Are you really sure it was her?

MIA
We can't confirm or deny anything at the moment, Mr. Fournier. Besides, we're the ones asking the questions.

He BURSTS into tears. Tries to lean on his wife's SHOULDER but she leans away from him.

MIA (cont'd)
(nodding at Janice)
When was the last time you saw Ms. Fournier?

JANICE
Last night, 7-ish. She offered to take me out for a drink but I had to feed Lenny.

MIA
Lenny?

JANICE
My turtle.

MIA
Ah.

C.R.
Did she seem anxious at all, as if she just committed an act of extreme violence the night before?

Mia looks at him as if that was the dumbest thing she had ever heard.

JANICE
I mean...she seemed fine, I think. Doesn't she like... have anxiety already? Don't we all?

HARUMPHS of agreement from around the room.

MIA
Dad? Mom? Notice anything odd at
breakfast?

DAD
(through tears)
She didn't quite laugh as hard at my
jokes.

MOM
She told us she was becoming a
mailman, and that certainly qualifies
as odd.

Janice FROWNS.

MOM (cont'd)
No offense, of course.

JANICE
Taken.

MIA
You said earlier that she was having
trouble getting a job?

MOM
Yes. Said that we shouldn't worry
though. That she found a "solution."
Go figure. Girl couldn't do anything.

MIA
I'm confused--she just got a *PhD*?

JANICE
She got a what now?

MOM
Yeah, a *PhD* in *Literature*. Bullshit
degree.

Mia can't form words to respond to that. Dad is now crying
into Janice's sleeve. She pats him on the head.

C.R.
Do you think that drive to please you
was enough for your daughter to--

Mia punches him in the arm, like, hard. Stares at him.

MOM
I wouldn't deny it.

DAD
(WAILING)
My baby!

INT. YELLOW VW BUG - DAY [DRIVING]

Alivia at the wheel, Hughes next to her--both look back at a sleeping Tony Hale in the back. Alivia looks out at the light traffic on the highway before them.

HUGHES
You're a mailman?

ALIVIA
A mail person, yeah...we don't like
gendering ourselves.

HUGHES
And mail person was the best you
could come up with? Did *postal worker*
not work?

Tony STIRS.

HUGHES (cont'd)
He should wake soon...What's the
plan?

ALIVIA
The plan?

HUGHES
Yes. The plan. As in where we're
driving?

ALIVIA
They are. We. We're good at planning.

A GLINT in Hughes's eyes. He can feel something is off.

Alivia looks in her rear-view mirror. A BABY BLUE PRIUS
behind them, a WOMAN IN SUNGLASSES driving. Alivia frowns.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
How about Portland?

HUGHES
(judgy)
Hm.

ALIVIA

What? Something wrong with Portland?

Hughes SHRUGS.

HUGHES

It's not the matter with Portland necessarily, barring that its disgusting. Just wondering why you would want to leave the entire state if you have nothing to worry about, dear?

Tony STIRS. Alivia motions to Hughes to stay quiet.

ALIVIA

Heyyy buddyyyy. How ya doin'?

Tony sits up, hand on his throbbing head. Looks at Alivia, then around at the inside of his car. His hands are zip-tied together.

TONY

Did you...kidnap me?

ALIVIA

Ya know in middle school when they would confiscate your phone and your mom had to come get it at the end of the day?

TONY

I mean, my kids have, but--

ALIVIA

We confiscated your phone. And you. You can have it back later.

TONY

You keep using we and I only see you kidnapping me, unless your partner is a child. Or a dwarf.

Hughes SNORTS from laughter. Immediately realizes what he's done. Tony's eyes are WIDE AS HELL.

ALIVIA

Little uh, Timmy here, really, uh, appreciates a good coincidence.

TONY

Tell me what's going on immediately or so help me, I will crash my own car.

Alivia looks at Tony, then gives a SMIRK and NOD to Hughes.

HUGHES

It's wonderful to meet you, and I want to apologize for knocking you briefly unconscious. I know it isn't great to sleep after you acquire a concussion, but we needed to get you in the car.

Hughes looks at Tony. Tony appears to look back, *but can't see Hughes.*

Tony SQUEEZES his eyes closed.

TONY

I'm choosing to believe you're an excellent ventriloquist.

ALIVIA

I wish. Honestly don't fucking know, dude.

HUGHES

I'm a manifestation of her mind. Or a ghost. Hard to tell, really. Murdered one moment, defying physics the next.

Tony opens one eye to peek out--

TONY

You don't know who murdered you?

HUGHES

I've as of yet tried to, plainly, avoid the conversation entirely, but I have my suspicions, yes.

Alivia doesn't take her eyes off the road.

TONY

Wait--did you just leave the postal truck in the middle of the road?

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BURNING MAIL TRUCK - DAY

Mia and C.R. stare at the FIRE consuming the mail truck. Janice's face painted on the side? Burning.

MIA

Ya know what's odd? For a PhD? Not the...best at covering her tracks.

C.R. sips on a green smoothie.

INT. YELLOW VW BUG - DAY [DRIVING]

Alivia looks at the PRIUS WOMAN to her right, who pulls down her sunglasses and WINKS. Alivia snaps back at the road.

TONY

Why couldn't you call the police?

HUGHES

Huh?

TONY

Like, why stop me if you're attempting to solve a murder?

Alivia SPEEDS UP and CUTS in front of the Prius, then BREAK CHECKS her. TAPS her fingers on the wheel.

Hughes looks at Alivia as if he's CONNECTING THE DOTS. Alivia notices his stare--

ALIVIA

What garbage is he spouting to you?

HUGHES

He's...What's your name?

Tony looks ASTOUNDED at the suggestion.

TONY

You seriously don't know who I am?

Hughes and Alivia SHRUG.

The PRIUS is now trailing close behind them.

When Alivia looks back at the woman driving, her vision SHIFTS and the woman looks like a smiling SUSAN.

TONY (cont'd)

Tony? The actor Tony Hale? Arrested Development?

HUGHES

Tony Hale here's brought up some intriguing points you should address.

Alivia SPEEDS UP, ZOOMING around around a SEMI on the right to see the--

PRIUS coming up on the left. *Susan WAVES* at her.

Alivia BLINKS and *the Prius is GONE*. Shakes her head in disbelief.

HUGHES (cont'd)

Were you just stressed? Is that why you tried to chuck a blade at me?

TONY

Well this becomes more dramatic by the second.

ALIVIA

Can we just--

TONY

I mean, damn, if you threw a *blade* at the guy, you kinda incriminated yourself, girl.

HUGHES

I'm getting mildly uncomfortable with where this is going--

TONY

Has she answered a single one of your questions since you appeared?

A beat. Tony with a SLY GRIN. Hughes with a sincere look at Alivia.

Alivia just tries to drive.

TONY (cont'd)

I mean, if you--

ALIVIA

Shut up.

TONY

Now come on, I think I have the right
to--

ALIVIA

Ya don't. If you're an actor, why
don't you *act* like you know when to
shut the fuck up. K?

She SWALLOWS. She looks back at the road and

SUSAN is CRAWLING ON TOP OF THE GLASS, SMILING, EYES WIDE AT ALIVIA.

Alivia **SCREAMS** and **BREAKS**, flinging Susan's body onto the highway.

Alivia **SWINGS** the **CAR RIGHT** onto the rumble strips and **BREAKS** suddenly to a **STOP**.

Tony **SLAMS** his head into the seat in front of him. The airbag **DEPLOYS** and **WHACKS** Alivia in the chest. Hughes scrambles to the airbag, trying to get it off her.

HUGHES

Are you okay?

Alivia, holding back **TEARS**, manages to get the door open and **FALLS OUT** of the car, stumbling out on the street.

Cars pass as she limps down the highway.

Downtown Los Angeles looms ahead.

Hughes gets out of the car and calls out--

HUGHES (cont'd)

We can figure this out together!

Alivia **TURNS**, tears now rolling down her face.

Looks at him...

And turns back.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Mia and C.R. with their hands on their chins, considering something ahead of them.

MIA
Another board, maybe?

C.R.
And more yarn to connect the tidly-
bits that are related.

C.R. hurries off. Reveal a WALL COVERED roof to floor in cork-boards, with at least ten strands of yarn coming out from each item on the boards. Mia narrows her eyes.

Approaches the wall and examines the BLUEPRINTS of Hughes's house.

MIA
How do you go through so much effort
to construct a *murder blueprint* to
just leave it in the floor?

C.R. appears RIGHT NEXT TO HER with another cork-board--

C.R.
Maybe she didn't intend to leave the
house.

MIA
Like something forced her out?

C.R.
Sure. Rowdy ex-boyfriend came to get
revenge and she had to get out of
there, or something. Somethin'
dramatic.

MIA
She's a PhD, she doesn't have...rowdy
ex-boyfriends...

C.R. is putting some PAPERS up on the new cork-board--

MIA (cont'd)
I didn't know we had new information?

C.R.
Oh, I've been waiting to bring it up
until we got done parading around
town.

MIA

Parading? We're on an investigation,
what should we be doing, *lounging*?
Speaking of--earlier. Why were you
asking such direct questions? I know
you're my boss, but damn, you were--

C.R. shows her one of the papers. On it, several portrait
shots of GRUMPY-LOOKING OLD WHITE MEN.

C.R.

Loads of murders across LA county
recently, all old white guys. College
professor-types.

MIA

Are they professors or just
professor-types?

C.R.

Oh, like real professors.

Mia SIGHS. He picks up a ball of yarn from the floor.

C.R. (cont'd)

I'm trying to get this done as
quickly as possible, so we can get
back to the normal stuff. Ya know.
Smoothies and traffic stops.

He smiles. She doesn't.

EXT. THE 405 - ON-RAMP - DAY

Alivia wipes tears away from her face as she walks down the
ON-RAMP. A car coming up HONKS at her. She flips it off.

Halfway down, she STOPS. Listens... In the distance, an
amplified WOMAN'S VOICE--

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

We will not stand by while the
institutions of oppression still
reign!

ALIVIA

(under her breath)
True enough.

HONNNNKKKKK. Another car coming up.

She ignores it. Walks down the ramp with more purpose.

INT. YELLOW VW BUG - DAY

Tony's eyes groggily open. He sits up in the backseat. The front seat is empty.

TONY

Uhh. Ghost guy? You there?

Silence. He BREATHES out in relief.

Leans to the front, looks around. Opens the glove-box and grabs his PHONE. Dials 9-1-1.

TONY (cont'd)

Uh, hey, this is Tony Hale. I was kidnapped by this lady and a ghost--
...ly looking guy...and I'm, uh,
stranded on the side of the 405. I
need an immediate pickup.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Who the fuck is Tony Hale and why are
you calling, get a fuckin' Uber.

9-1-1 hangs up on him. Tony is flabbergasted--

TONY

Hey Google? Make me appointment with
Dr. Meeks.

EXT. THE 405 - ON-RAMP - DAY

Hughes stops in the same spot Alivia did. Listens--

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

We won't stand for it!

A JABBING PAIN in his RIGHT LEG causes him to fall half to his knees, but he catches himself. GRIMACES and STANDS.

EXT. BUSY CITY STREET - DAY

Alivia limps down the street following the woman's voice--

WOMAN'S VOICE

My pussy will not be pandered to!

A BUSINESS MAN on a phone call behind Alivia covers his phone's speaker with his hand--

BUSINESS MAN

I'll pander to that pussy all I want.

Alivia stops.

Turns.

STOMPS over to him.

Stops *maybe* four inches from his face.

He's back on the phone.

BUSINESS MAN (cont'd)

Oh, nothing. Just some bitch
screaming downtown.

(notices her)

Can I do something for you?

She PUNCHES him square in the nose.

He FALLS to the ground, HOLDS his BLEEDING FACE.

BUSINESS MAN (cont'd)

(squeaky)

What the fuck was that?

Alivia continues on toward the VOICE.

The man picks his phone back up and puts it to his ear--

BUSINESS MAN (cont'd)

What? No, I didn't get punched in the
face by a woman again. Who hates
women, now, Jessica?

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Alivia looks on in AWE at what's before her.

A field full of WOMEN. A stage at the far corner with a decadently-dressed KEY-NOTE SPEAKER, an older Black woman, at the mic.

Hand-made SIGNS being held by women around Alivia with things like "YOU CAN'T *GET THIS* UNTIL YOU GET THIS" (with a crude drawing of a woman stroking an hourglass) and another that says simply, "PUSSY WILL PREVAIL."

KEY-NOTE SPEAKER

We must ask ourselves a simple question...How do we achieve progress? Of course, we're angry, of course, we're pissed off. How do we channel that anger?

Alivia STARES.

KEY-NOTE SPEAKER (cont'd)

What do we need? We need representation. We need power. We need to take institutions to the battle field for a fuckin' beat down.

The crowd CHEERS.

KEY-NOTE SPEAKER (cont'd)

But let me get this straight. We have no excuse for behaving like men.

Silence.

KEY-NOTE SPEAKER (cont'd)

No matter how much I may speak of metaphorical beat-downs, I will not condone violence. We will not stoop to the war men have inflicted upon the world for centuries. We will--no. We *must* rise above, by protesting, by voting, by impacting a generation of more empathetic, less power-hungry individuals. We will rise above.

The crowd ERUPTS in CHEERS!

But Alivia looks straight on at the speaker. She doesn't hear her anymore, just...STARES. Her eyes portray an emotion somewhere between angry and resigned. This is something she's heard a million times before.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FIELD - 20 FEET AWAY - NIGHT

The BUSINESS MAN still holding his bloody nose next to TWO COPS.

BUSINESS MAN

(pointing)

There. There's the lady who just sucker-punched me.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

A TAP on Alivia's shoulder.

She turns to see DR. WAITS smiling at her--

WAITS
Protest doesn't work, dear.

Alivia **SLAPS** Waits and *her face morphs into ONE OF THE COPS.*

The cop **SLAMS** her into the ground.

The crowd STANDS and WATCHES as Alivia is CUFFED.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - THIRTY FEET AWAY - DAY

Hughes solemnly watches as Alivia is FORCED BACK UP and led away.

He follows them.

EXT. OUTSIDE A POLICE CAR - DAY

The COPS push her into the back of the car.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

She turns her head back to look at the protest resuming behind her as the police car lurches forward.

Alivia looks back toward the road ahead. Closes her eyes.

We MOVE UP to the ceiling and through the roof to see--

HUGHES, pressing himself flat against the top of the car, eyes WIDE but SMILING.

INT. POLICE STATION - MAIN OFFICE SPACE - DAY

Alivia being led through a HIGH-TECH FACILITY by the cops.

She passes

- A MUSCULAR OFFICER boxing with a HOLOGRAPHIC PARTNER.

- A MUSTACHED CHEF waving a spatula over UNCOOKED DONUTS and when he TAPS the spatula on them, they POOF! into The Simpson's-Style Donuts.

- The CAPTAIN interrogates a CRIMINAL hooked up to a super-advanced-looking polygraph machine.

CAPTAIN
Did you do it?

CRIMINAL
I swear, it wasn't me.

The Captain looks at the polygraph. It speaks with a British women's voice--

POLYGRAPH MACHINE
Not only did he do it, he also jay-walked yesterday.

The captain stares accusingly at the criminal.

Alivia BLINKS, not sure if she's imagining it.

INT. POLICE STATION - OLD-TIMEY PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Alivia is led into a dusty room with a CAGED-OFF AREA in the far corner and a single desk & chair near the door. A bearskin rug on the floor. She looks around, confused.

Several TOUGH-LOOKING INMATES are all on one side of the cage, where there are more bars separating two halves.

The COP leads Alivia to the caged area and OPENS the door with a 1820-STYLE KEY, PUSHES her inside the OTHER HALF.

The cop begins to leave--

ALIVIA
Wait!

He waits.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
Why is it so...Blazing Saddles in here?

The COP shrugs. Turns to leave. She closes her eyes.

The cop SLAMS the door shut.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Susan alone in the room, looking at the SCREEN.

In front of her, a FILE FOLDER.

On the screen, the DOT representing the mail truck's progress BLINKS.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - HALLWAY - DAY

Susan walks at brisk pace. In her hand, the FILE FOLDER.

In the far left corner, it's labeled in small text:

THE PALTROW PROJECT

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - DAY

Mia sits against a wall, beside an OPEN DOOR.

She LEANS over to look inside the doorway to see C.R. tangled up in a web of yarn.

Leans back.

Across the hall from her, the OLD-TIMEY PRISON ROOM.

Pulls out her phone, types in a number. Just looks at it for a beat...then presses call.

INT. CREEPY WAREHOUSE - DAY

XENA (late 40's, Black woman) presses against a wall with THREE OTHER SWAT OFFICERS. She has some CRAZY GUN in her hand, dressed in a BULLET PROOF VEST.

LEAD SWAT OFFICER
Ready to head out?

Xena and the other two officers NOD.

A beat while they wait for the lead officer to SIGNAL.

Xena's PHONE RINGS. She steps off the wall to take it--

LEAD SWAT OFFICER (cont'd)
GO GO GO!

The officers RUSH FORWARD into the warehouse, GUNS DRAWN, while Xena causally paces about on the phone.

XENA
Whaddup girl, haven't talked in a hot
sec!

INTERCUT B/N MIA and XENA

MIA
You busy?

GUNFIRE RINGS OUT from inside the warehouse.

XENA
Nah, I got nothing.

MIA
I wanted to ask if you had any info
about some cases. We're dealing with
a homicide and--

XENA
You still with that idiot, Carl?

Mia SIGHS.

MIA
He goes by C.R. now, to seem cooler.

XENA
You've gotta dump him and get a new
partner that'll get you where you
need to be.

THE LEAD SWAT OFFICER stumbles out of the warehouse behind
Xena. His stomach is BLEEDING PROFUSELY.

LEAD SWAT OFFICER
Xena...

Xena doesn't turn around.

XENA
Look at me, bitch. Played Jim like a
fuckin' card and look where I am now!

The lead SWAT officer COLLAPSES.

MIA
I just...I can't do that to Carl.
He's a good guy, he just...

Mia looks back at C.R, who just SITS in the floor, having
wrapped himself up like a mummy with the yarn.

MIA (cont'd)

You have any murdered professor cases over there?

XENA

Let me think...Oh, yeah, had one from USC the other day. Stabbed, I think. I'm not on it, but yeah, I know about it.

MIA

Do you have any suspects?

XENA

Heard they were at a dead end, t b h.

Mia CHUCKLES at the pun. Xena SMILES.

MIA

Let them know to re-look at any recent PhDs. Women, in particular. I gotta feeling.

XENA

Ooh, ooh. Let me guess. White women're up to some shit.

MIA

You could say that.

Behind Xena, TWO STEREOTYPICAL BANK ROBBERS attempt to creep out, but she TURNS and **SHOOTS** each of them in the leg. They both fall to the ground in pain.

XENA

We gotta communicate more, girl. I swear, we'd have our guy in the slammer and wouldn't even know.

INT. POLICE STATION - OLD-TIMEY PRISON CELL - DAY

Alivia sits with her back to the bars, hands over her face.

JERRY (O.S.)

You okay, Lady?

She peeks through her fingers.

Opposite her, the TOUGH-LOOKING INMATES don't look so tough. In fact, they look concerned.

The one with the most tattoos, JERRY, leans into the dividing bars between their sides while the other two play rock-paper-scissors.

JERRY
I see ya. You chill?

ALIVIA
I'm as chill as I can be at the moment.

She drops her hands to her lap. Jerry sits down cross-legged across from her.

JERRY
I don't wanna be cliché or nothing, but...whatcha in for?

ALIVIA
Punched a cop.

All three inmates HURRAH!

JERRY
I like that. Feisty.

ALIVIA
That's an adjective, alright.

JERRY
What would you say?

ALIVIA
Mentally ill. Delusional. Terrified, maybe?

JERRY
You don't seem like it. Buckeye's delusional. You ain't.

He points back at BUCKEYE, who WAVES.

JERRY (cont'd)
He thinks he still plays ball at Ohio State.

BUCKEYE
(shouting)
THE...Ohio State University.

JERRY
Jerry, by the way.

He reaches his hand out to shake.

A FIGHT has broken out between the other inmates.

JERRY (cont'd)
Hey! Idiots!

He goes over to stop their fighting.

Alivia with a genuine SMILE.

ALIVIA
Jerry?

JERRY
Mhm, give me a sec.

He has tied both of the inmates hands up with a DUSTY ROPE.
Comes back over to her.

JERRY (cont'd)
Watcha got?

ALIVIA
I'm never gonna see you again, eh?

JERRY
Probs not.

The door CREAKKSSS open. Jerry furls his eyebrows, but Alivia is too distracted to notice.

ALIVIA
Can I confess something?

JERRY
My middle name's Confess, baby, spill them beans.

Jerry notices that behind Alivia, the CHAIR moves out from below the desk *seemingly by itself*.

ALIVIA
I...I don't know how to even fucking say this, Jesus fucking penis...

JERRY
Hey, you don't hafta if you--Did you...just say...jesus penis?

He laughs a little at first. A chuckle. It builds to a CACKLE, until he's almost crying.

ALIVIA
Hey! I'm trying to--

He laughs LOUDER than she can speak.

HUGHES (O.S.)
Hello?!

Alivia's eyes WIDEN and she turns around for the first time to see

HUGHES

Sitting at the empty desk. Jerry stops laughing.

JERRY
Who was that?

HUGHES
It's *what* the hell am I, my friend?
I'm not sure myself.

Hughes advances forward toward the cell. Jerry can't see Hughes, but he STUMBLES backward toward the other two horrified inmates anyway.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Perhaps a voice? A metaphysical
disembodied head?

Alivia stands up and presses against the bars, watching with a SMILE.

He JINGLES the KEYS in his hand.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Or perhaps I'm the only ghost able to
get you out of this...BOO!

All of the inmates JUMP! COWER in the corner. Hughes talks to Alivia through the steel bars.

HUGHES (cont'd)
You got yourself arrested pretty
quickly after you left me.
Impressive. Honestly.

ALIVIA
How did you manage to even follow me?
You ride on top of the car?

He SHRUGS. Smiles.

HUGHES
 Something like that.

He starts to insert the key into the hole but STOPS...

HUGHES (cont'd)
 Before I do this--

ALIVIA
 You want me to talk to you?

He UNLOCKS the door and it SWINGS OPEN.

Alivia turns to the inmates--

ALIVIA (cont'd)
 Should I talk to him, boys?

They are still SHAKING with fear, and don't respond.

She steps out of the cell.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
 I guess we can talk.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - THE WAITS OFFICE - DAY

Waits holds up a BRIGHT PINK DILDO up to the LAMPLIGHT. Examines it. WOBBLIES IT in her hands. It sounds like when you wobble laminated paper.

WAITS
 What do you think? Is it flexible enough?

Susan looks on with a slight disgust.

SUSAN
 I'm, uh...not sure how to judge your, uh, sexual needs, but--

WAITS
 Mine? No. All these years and still learning. It's the official HELP prototype.

SUSAN
 Is...maybe I'm coming at this wrong, but all of our members. They're going to be using *that one* dildo?

SUSAN
Jail, ma'am.

WAITS
Good. She deserves it, the horrible
job she did.

SUSAN
But--

WAITS
But nothing.

A beat.

WAITS (cont'd)
Is it pink enough?

Waits pulls the dildo back out. Wobbles it.

INT. POLICE CAR - EVENING

C.R. playfully looks at Mia as he SINGS without the radio
on--

C.R.
*It feels so good to be this young and
have this fun and be successful.
I'm so successful.
(point at Mia)
And girl you too, you are so young
and beautiful and so successful.*

She stares forward.

EXT. EMPTY BUS STOP - EVENING

Alivia leans forward and looks down a street lined on both
sides with palm trees.

ALIVIA
How are you supposed to know when it
even comes?

Hughes looks over a BUS SCHEDULE.

HUGHES
You have a lot to explain.

ALIVIA
Huh?

HUGHES
Postal workers appreciate the bus.
What are you?

A beat...

ALIVIA
PhD.

Hughes SNORTS.

HUGHES
No, I said like, what are you? As in,
your career?

ALIVIA
I have my PhD in Rhetoric and
Composition. Berkeley, asshole.

The BUS stops in front of them. Alivia takes one step onto
the bus and looks back at Hughes who's still processing it--

ALIVIA (cont'd)
It ain't believable?

She steps to the BUS DRIVER. Hughes follows, smiling.

BUS DRIVER
That'll be seven-twenty-five.

ALIVIA
That's not bad.

Hughes COLLAPSES on the stairs, clutching his CHEST.

Alivia TURNS and leans down to check on him.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
What happened? You good?

Hughes slowly RISES to a hunched-over position. He looks
down at the stairs. His eyes look troubled, even scared.

By the time he looks up at Alivia, they're back to normal.

HUGHES
The heart-troubles don't stop after
you die, I see.

Alivia helps him up the stairs and further into the bus.

The BUS DRIVER shakes it off--

BUS DRIVER
 God damn...lack of homeless
 infrastructure.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TIK-TOK TEA ROOM - EVENING

Alivia and Hughes stand in front of a new bus stop.
 Opposite them, the iconic green CLOCK on the diner.

ALIVIA
 Question.

HUGHES
 Answer.

ALIVIA
 What are we doing here, again?

HUGHES
 If we had talked any in literally any
 of the time we've been together, you
 would have realized that *I have*
unfinished business, like every other
 ghost.

ALIVIA
 How cliché of you.

INT. TIK-TOK TEA ROOM - EVENING

A WOMAN (30's) sits at a small, circular table with the
 YOUNG GIRL ON HUGHES'S WALL. The girl picks at her food.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TIK-TOK TEA ROOM - NIGHT

Hughes looks in on the small family through the massive
 WINDOW. Alivia leans backwards against the glass.

ALIVIA
 Why don't ya just go say hi?

He GLARES at her. Back inside.

INT. TIK-TOK TEA ROOM - EVENING

Alivia looks out at the mother and child from behind a GIANT
 NEWSPAPER. Hughes sure is lucky he's invisible, cause he's
 staring RIGHT AT THEM.

HUGHES
Do something for me.

ALIVIA
Something?

HUGHES
Something.

ALIVIA
I can only do something if I know
what something is.

HUGHES
I'm about to tell you what something
is.

A WAITER stops at the table.

CONCERNED WAITER
Everything okay, here, ma'am?

ALIVIA
Everything's lickity-split, fine n'
dandy, sonny.

The waiter eyes Alivia as he scurries off.

HUGHES
As soon as the woman leaves, I need
you to go talk to the young one for
me.

ALIVIA
How'd you even know they were going
to be here at this time?

Looks back at the mother and girl. The mother STANDS UP,
rubs the top of the girl's head, and walks toward the
BATHROOM.

HUGHES
Go, go, go!

ALIVIA
What?

HUGHES
Go talk to her.

ALIVIA
The child?

HUGHES

This is your chance!

Alivia gets up. WANDERS seemingly aimlessly over to the girl. Not looking where she's going, she CRASHES into her table. The girl looks up at her.

LUCY LANDSON (7 years old) looks remarkably like Hughes.

LUCY

Hiya, miss.

ALIVIA

Hi there.

LUCY

My pa told me not to talk to strangers, but you look okay.

ALIVIA

Thank ya.

HUGHES whispers into Alivia's ear--

HUGHES

Tell her I love her.

Alivia turns to him and mouths "Go away." Hughes BACKS AWAY.

ALIVIA

You know I talked to your pa recently. He said he loved you very much.

Lucy continues to fiddle with her food.

LUCY

Momma said he wasn't coming today.

Alivia SWALLOWS. Before she can speak--

LUCY (cont'd)

How you know pa?

Hughes stands a few feet away, TEARS in his eyes.

A COUGH from across the room. Hughes turns to see the MOTHER returning from the bathroom.

HUGHES

You need to **move**.

But Alivia is listening to Lucy--

LUCY
 Momma doesn't like taking me to Pa's
 readings. Says they're too grown-up.

The mother ARRIVES at the table. Hughes's eyes are WIDE.

MOTHER
 Who's your new friend, Luce?

LUCY
 She's friends with Pa.

MOTHER
 (to Alivia)
 If your friends with him, you're not
 our friend.

ALIVIA
 Did he do something I'm missing or...

MOTHER
 Did he do something? What *has* he
 done? He's not even here *right now*,
 and he set this up! He's probably
 with one of those bitches from his
 department, or--

*As the mother rants, Alivia's eyes narrow, and the mother's
 face MORPHS to Alivia's MOM.*

ALIVIA
 Bitches? They are educated women with
 jobs, working toward a future where
 all of academia isn't crusty ass
 dudes with Salinger fetishes.

Alivia looks back toward Hughes but he ISN'T THERE.

When she looks back, the mother is back to normal.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
 Excuse me for a second, I'm gonna go
 bitch it up outside for a second.
 (to Lucy)
 Don't forget he loves ya, kid.

She gets up and makes her way to the door. Lucy WAVES bye,
 but the mother SLAPS her hand down.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TIK-TOK TEA ROOM - EVENING

Hughes is sitting up against the glass. His face is pink from the tears. Alivia opens the door, SPOTS Hughes. Sits down next to him.

ALIVIA
That didn't go the worst it could've.

Hughes STARES at her.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
Hey, she didn't beat me to death with her purse.

Hughes CHUCKLES through tears.

HUGHES
Out of all the things that suck about being murdered? Not being able to talk to her.

ALIVIA
To be fair, your...daughter?

He nods.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
She's a bit of a...what's the word?

HUGHES
Stubborn person?

ALIVIA
I was looking for cunt, but that'll work.

A beat.

HUGHES
Did you say you had a PhD?

Alivia looks away from him, at the **SUNSET** before them.

HUGHES (cont'd)
I knew you were too smart to be a postal worker.

ALIVIA
Don't be a dick. I happen to know a pretty cool postal worker. Name's Jan....she likes YG, like, a lot.

He concedes. BREATHES OUT. A beat. Then--

HUGHES
Why'd you murder me, Liv?

She looks at him--

ALIVIA
I'll answer you if you answer me.

HUGHES
Fire away. Wait--no. Stab away.

ALIVIA
Fuck you. Why does she think you're
so much of an ass?

HUGHES
(sighs)
I've been editing this feminist
anthology for years and I just...
didn't see them too often. Figured I
could just buy my way into being
Lucy's favorite. Didn't go over too
well with her momma.

ALIVIA
Oh. Well that's not too bad.

HUGHES
No?

ALIVIA
No. You were doing all you can....
What kind of anthology did you say?

HUGHES
Women's literature. LGBT...stuff. Oh,
Q too. Is that all the letters?
Really trying to embrace a new canon
of writers rather than the
disgustingly male one we currently
have.

ALIVIA
I thought...

HUGHES
You aren't allowed more than one
question.

ALIVIA
They told me...

A beat.

HUGHES

Does they refer to a person or an organization?

INT. POLICE STATION - CAPTAIN'S OFFICE - EVENING

The captain is incredulous.

CAPTAIN

Help? You need MORE help?

Mia sits across from him.

MIA

There's something going on here, and I need the support to investigate it further.

CAPTAIN

What's wrong with Carl? Ain't he supportive enough?

MIA

It's not that...I need more. Women in particular. It'll be easier to get in with women in academia if they don't have to talk to men. I feel like.

CAPTAIN

How many ya need?

MIA

10 women.

CAPTAIN

10? God damn, hadn't had that many officers on a guy since Rodney King!

Mia **CLENCHES HER TEETH**. Her eyes are **ANGRY**, but she quickly changes them to be **HAPPIER**. Her voice is strained--

MIA

I know, sir, I just need--

C.R. opens the door to the office behind her and pokes his head in--

C.R.

What ya meeting about?

CAPTAIN

Carl, you're just in time. We were just discussing more people to the Landson case.

C.R.

More people? Why do we need *more* people? All we have to do is find her at this point.

The captain MOTIONS to Mia to explain--

MIA

I don't think she's acting alone. It's a...crime family or something. For PhDs.

CAPTAIN

Do you share the same beliefs, Carl?

C.R. looks at Mia...then at the captain--

C.R.

I'm sorry, but I just don't know.
(to Mia)
Couldn't she have just murdered him because of a lover's quarrel or a bad grade or something?

Mia's mouth hangs slightly open. She BLINKS repeatedly, THROWS her hands up in the air.

CAPTAIN

Is there a problem, Washington?

She leans into the captain--

MIA

You are the biggest piece of shit I've ever fucking met. Did David Duke put you in charge on purpose, or did you just *plead* until he gave in? It's twenty-fucking-nineteen and you run this place like a fucking Residential school for everyone that's not a white fucking male.

She turns her attention to C.R.

MIA (cont'd)

I don't understand you. I want to, but like...how are you in charge of me? Do you even like being a police officer?

C.R.

Mia, I--

MIA

Don't fucking interrupt me one more fucking time with Carly Rae fucking Jepson or the *god-damn paperwork*, I swear--you just wanna drive around all day and fill out social security numbers and drink another damn smoothie until you *collapse* under the weight of institutional incompetence.

CAPTAIN

Washington--

MIA

No.

She tries to take her BADGE off, but it gets STUCK. She pulls at it, but nope.

Frustrated, she RIPS her entire police uniform top IN HALF and THROWS it on the ground.

MIA (cont'd)

Fuck you both. We need better fucking cops.

Storms out of the room.

CAPTAIN

Bit of an overreaction.

C.R. gets up to follow Mia.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE IN-N-OUT BURGER - NIGHT

Alivia and Hughes POKE their heads out from behind the In-N-Out DRIVE-THRU SIGN.

A TESLA pulls up to order and the OWNER gives them a weird look. They IGNORE him and CREEP to the

IVY-COVERED WALL.

HUGHES

Odd place to keep a secret organization.

Alivia nods. Yup.

HUGHES (cont'd)

Remind me how it's laid out once more. I need to get a feel for where we're going.

ALIVIA

I don't know *precisely* where we're going, nor...generally what we're doing here now, when we could be on the trail to Oregon.

HUGHES

We've got to stop this from happening again. More men from being murdered. If I can't see Lucy again, I'm going to at least save another *you* from making this mistake.

She doesn't really react, just kind of...looks forward.

HUGHES (cont'd)

Do you see that this is a mistake?

She walks to the LONGER STRAND OF IVY.

ALIVIA

I wouldn't murder you again, given what I know now.

HUGHES

And in general?

She SHRUGS.

And PULLS the ivy.

HUGHES (cont'd)

Answer me.

They FALL into the TRAPDOOR ENTRANCE.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - LOBBY - NIGHT

Alivia is prepared for the landing this time.

They CRASH into the uterus pillows, but Alivia manages to DUCK DOWN immediately.

ALIVIA
(whispers)
Don't move.

Before her, H.E.L.P. WORKERS scramble about the lobby like ants, each in a LAB-COAT and with a CLIPBOARD.

Hughes POPS up beside her. Only eyes and hair.

HUGHES
Are there normally a hive full of science bees scurrying about?

ALIVIA
Something's happening.

She points at 10 o' clock. A single DOOR about SEVENTY FEET AWAY. Hughes follows her hand--

HUGHES
What's that?

ALIVIA
Supplies.

HUGHES
How are we gonna get there?

She looks at him like he's just forgotten he's invisible.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Oh. Invisibility and all that.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Hughes CREEPS up to the pillows. Doesn't see Alivia. Frowns. Fuck it.

DIVES into the pillow pit.

ALIVIA (O.S.)
You idiot.

Alivia pops back up just enough for her eyes to be visible.

ALIVIA
Have any trouble?

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - PROTEST PANTRY

A H.E.L.P. WORKER slumped on the floor, leaning up on the cabinet. Unconscious.

HUGHES (PRE-LAP)

No.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - LOBBY

He throws her a PUSSY HAT, a SHIRT that has the following text on it:

HEROINES for the ELIMINATION of LOATHSOME PROFESSORS

And a KNIFE.

She raises her eyebrows at him.

HUGHES

I thought that would be useful, with your history.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Alivia in the hat and shirt walks next to Hughes through a crowd of H.E.L.P. WORKERS.

HOLDS HER BREATH....

They get out the other side in tact.

ALIVIA

I can't believe this shirt is inconspicuous.

HUGHES

How do they have enough space underground for this to even exist?

ALIVIA

We've already established that physics don't particularly work as we thought.

HUGHES

My question still stands.

They turn a CORNER to the **HALLWAY** to come face-to-face with **TESSA**.

Alivia's eyes WIDEN, then back to normal.

TESSA
Cox! We need you in the lab.

ALIVIA
I'm not...Cox.

TESSA
Don't go pretending now. Orders from
the top. Let's go.

Tessa pulls out a LABCOAT from...nowhere and puts it on Alivia, leading her away.

Alivia turns back to Hughes--

ALIVIA
(mouthing the words)
The archive!

Hughes watches Alivia walking away with Tessa.

HUGHES
(muttering)
The swan dive?...
The archive!

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - HALLWAY

Hughes scans a DIRECTORY on the wall. It's ambiguously labeled. Elephant symbol next to an arrow left. Anteater symbol next to an arrow right.

HUGHES
How do I interpret this?

He finally sees a BOOK with a LEFT ARROW halfway down.

Starts off left down the hallway.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - THE LAB

Alivia follows Tessa into a VERY VERY LARGE room, *filled* with WOMEN IN LABCOATS at individual work stations.

They walk down a row of CUBICLES until they stop at an empty one.

TESSA (O.S.)
 You know the drill, everything's
 almost ready, just...do your thang,
 girl.

When Alivia looks back at Tessa, she's GONE.

Sits down at the desk.

In front of her, a BEAKER filled with a FROTHY WHITE AND
 GREEN LIQUID.

Beside that?

A FILE FOLDER.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - HALLWAY - NIGHT

TWO WORKERS casually stroll down the hall.

WANDERING WORKER 1
 You boppin to the new T-Swizzle?

WANDERING WORKER 2
 Am I boppin? Girl. Best album she's
 released since the uh... shit. What's
 it called? The Ye collab.

WANDERING WORKER 1
 Oh, yeah, the, um. Damn. What was it?

They've reached their destination--THE PROTEST PANTRY. They
 open the door and see Cox's unconscious BODY propped up
 against the shelf.

WANDERING WORKER 2
 Oh! *Fake* Noose.

WANDERING WORKER 1
 Ahhh.

A beat while they consider how good the album was.

WANDERING WORKER 2
 We should call this in, eh?

WANDERING WORKER 1
 Oh, yeah.

Wandering Worker 1 SLAPS a RED BUTTON on the wall--

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - THE ARCHIVE

Hughes POKES his head in. Nobody around. Just a series of SHELVES that extend into the distance as far as he can see. FUCHSIA ARCHIVE BOXES line the shelves.

Steps in. Closes the door behind him.

Just then, a SIREN BLARES. RED LIGHTS FLASH.

Rushes up to the first box he sees. Opens it.

Pulls out a file. Skimming it--

HUGHES

Who kind of classification system
uses three letters?

We can barely make out that the file says "SZA" with a blurry photo of...SZA the RnB singer alongside it.

SUSAN (O.S.)

You appear to be in the iconography
section, whatever you are.

Hughes freezes.

Remembers he's invisible. DROPS the file. Turns around to see SUSAN twirling a JAGGED KNIFE in her hand.

HUGHES

You know I have the advantage. Unless
you're blind. In which case I
apologize.

SUSAN

I mean, I'm not blind. And...I don't
know how this works, but I don't see
a floating knife, sooo I'm...curious
what your advantage might be?

HUGHES

I have...my intellect.

SUSAN

Oh, sweetie. You must be one of our
targets. Tell me--what were you
hoping to do?

Stares at her. At the knife. She MOVES closer. He BACKS UP.

SUSAN (cont'd)
 Let's play a game. I'll even give you
 a head start. The victim profiles are
 on down this row, and to your right.

They both STOP.

Hughes looks behind him.

Reaches in his pocket and FEELS for something...

SUSAN (cont'd)
 (whisper)
 Go.

Hughes THROWS **THE PEBBLE** and we

TRACK it across the room in **SLOW MOTION** over FLASHING RED
 LIGHTS until it

SMACKS Susan in the nose.

SUSAN (cont'd)
 What the *fuck!*

Hughes SKIRTTTSSSS right out of there.

DOWN THE **ROW** and **RIGHT**.

SUSAN (O.S.)
 There's only one exit, so I don't
 know where you're planning on going.
 This room is a severe fire hazard.

Hughes SWIPES across a ROW of boxes, knocking them to the
 floor.

RUNS.

Looks up.

A SIGN at eye level.

It reads "THOSE PEOPLE WE MURDERED "

Susan comes around the corner.

Hughes OPENS a box and GRABS A STACK OF PAPER. Looks back.

Susan is 40 feet away. Stops. Aims roughly where she thinks
 he is with the knife.

HUGHES

You can't even see me. Besides--

THROWS THE KNIFE WITH ALL HER MIGHT.

Hughes watches as the knife

Comes

Toward

Him...

And goes **RIGHT THROUGH HIM**, lodging into the SIGN.

Susan's eyes WIDEN. Hughes SMILES.

HUGHES (cont'd)

I've had practice being murdered.

And with that? He BOOKS IT toward the exit.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - THE LAB - AT THE SAME TIME

ALIVIA

What the fuck is *this*?

Scans the FILE with TERRIFIED EYES.

Looks at the BEAKER.

A SIREN **BLARES** suddenly. RED LIGHTS FLASH.

CLOSES HER EYES. This will not happen again. Not now.

LAB LEADER (O.S.)

(via megaphone)

Ladies and everyone not identifying as a man, we need you to just pop outside for a sec while we search the facility for an intruder right quick. There'll be refreshments in the hallway for you to enjoy momentarily.

Opens her eyes. BREATHES OUT. It's real.

All the women around her GET UP and walk to the **EXIT**, which is guarded by TWO MUSCLED WOMEN WITH MACHETES.

Looks back at the BEAKER, then at her labcoat pocket.

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - THE LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Alivia stands in line at the exit. Looks around.
 She's next. Fiddles with the inside of her pocket.
 Approaches one of the MACHETED WOMEN.

MACHETED WOMAN
 Just your ID, please.

Alivia hands her a card. The guard looks at it...

MACHETED WOMAN (cont'd)
 Cox, this is a Fazolis gift card,
 stop playin' around.

Looks at the guard. At the machete.

ALIVIA
 I'm sorry.

Holds the knife with her shaking left hand at the guard's belly...

ALIVIA (cont'd)
 For this.

She pulls out the BEAKER and **THROWS IT** at the guard's face.

The guard **SCREAMS** as the acid *eats through her skin*. The machete drops to the floor.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
 I'm so sorry, I'm just gonna--

Delicately picks the machete up. Turns around quickly to make sure no one is following her. They all just STARE.

Goes through the **DOOR** and...

INT. H.E.L.P. UNDERGROUND HQ - HALLWAY - NIGHT

...into the **HALLWAY**. Locks the door behind her.

There's a turn she can make to her right, but ahead of her?
 At least FORTY WOMEN IN LABCOATS stare at her with refreshments in hand.

Alivia breathes heavily. Blinks.

The refreshments are now KNIVES in Alivia's sight.

ALIVIA

Shit.

She feels something happening to her right, and turns to feel Hughes **CRASH** into her. He smiles.

Susan comes RUMBLING down the hallway, but stops short when she notices Alivia with the machete.

They're all just kinda...staring at each other for a beat.

A FAMILIAR VOICE from behind the crowd of forty women...

WAITS (O.S)

(growing closer)

My, my, my. I can't say we've encountered any...disturbances before, but I assure you. We are equipped to deal with them.

Waits EMERGES from within the crowd. Compared to Alivia, Hughes, and Susan--who all look ragged and tired, Waits looks PRISTINE.

ALIVIA

You can't get away with this.

She points back at the door to the lab.

ALIVIA (cont'd)

It's too large scale an operation. There's no way you can get away with hurting so many people at one time.

HUGHES

(whispers to Alivia)

I kinda feel like we're not on the same page.

WAITS

The thing is--individual missions are too...variable. Often their deliverers fail. Spectacularly. This time, there is no chance of failure.

She smiles at Alivia.

WAITS (cont'd)

With Project Paltrow, we won't need our own deliverers. We'll use the most experienced deliverers in the whole country. And we'll take down Paltrow in the process, that *moron*.

HUGHES

(whispers to Alivia)
She keeps saying Paltrow, does she mean like...the GOOP lady?

WAITS

Not only will we eliminate those who hold outdated ideologies, we will erase their ideas from existence when we come to power. They've denied us representation for centuries? And now?

SUSAN

We take it from them.

Waits GLARES at Susan. Pure fucking hatred in her eyes. Everybody in the room knows it too. Alivia looks almost excited. The drammaaanaa.

WAITS

(at Susan)
Where the hell have you been to be suddenly interrupting the most impactful portion of my monologue?

SUSAN

I've been chasing the ghost.

Waits's face could not be more judging if she tried.

WAITS

Chasing the fucking ghost?

SUSAN

Not a metaphor. *Literally* chasing a ghost.

WAITS

I. Don't. Know. What. You. Mean.

SUSAN

There. Was. A. Ghost. In. The. Archive.

WAITS

You've gone insane, and I just did an evil monologue!

Alivia turns to Hughes while the leaders ARGUE.

ALIVIA

Is it just me, or do we have just enough time to escape?

WAITS

You are not in charge. I established this organization, I am the decision maker--you? You're a *leach*.

SUSAN

As *if* you did this all by yourself. I do every single consequential thing here. What do you do? Decide which dildo we all use?

BACK TO HUGHES AND ALIVIA

ALIVIA

Should we just...go?

HUGHES

Do you happen to see an exit or am I missing something?

Alivia looks around, then...

UP.

INT. IN-N-OUT BURGER - EARLY EARLY EARLY MORNING

Mia SLAMS fries into the strawberry milkshake in front of her then STUFFS them into her mouth.

A TV behind her is on the news. It reads:

"HALE TO RETIRE FROM ACTING"

Mia looks at her phone. Calls XENA.

It RINGS once and straight to VOICEMAIL. Hangs up. SIGHS.

MIA

Can't fucking move up so you blow up the spot it took you years to get. Can't stop shooting ourselves in the foot long enough for them to shoot us.

C.R. (O.S.)

Ya know--I'm getting better at playing detective myself.

She looks at him but doesn't speak. He slides in across from her.

C.R.

That's okay, you've.. said enough.
I'm sorry.

MIA

I'll forgive you if you know what
you're apologizing for.

C.R.

Christ, I don't *know*. I get hating
him. I just...have I not been helpful
toward the case? Have I called you a
slur in my sleep? I'm trying--

She SLURPS up the milkshake. Loudly. He goes to talk but she
holds up ONE FINGER. Wait. Then--

MIA

Trying isn't enough.

C.R.

But--

MIA

Do you have any idea how much more
difficult it was to get where I am?
To be taken seriously as a cop?

C.R.

Well I dunno your *personal*
experience, but--

MIA

How did you get your first cop gig?

He looks at her, frustrated but willing to play along--

C.R.

Pal had a recommendation ready for me
as soon as I got out of the academy.
Came to the Hills and...I don't know,
I just kinda got one.

MIA

Ask me how many jobs I applied for.

C.R.

How many jobs did you--

MIA

Twenty-seven. I had twenty-seven interviews with men like our fucking captain before he offered me. And he was the worst of all of 'em. The racist, sexist--

C.R.

You're gonna be talking all night if you continue with that list.

MIA

I can't afford any more barriers, Carl. There's no way for me to make the LAPD not like *him* without everything going *perfectly*. What can you do? It's not enough to not say a slur...You have to promise not to be another barrier for me. Can you do that?

C.R.

I can do that. I promise.

She holds out for a first bump and he's about to bump it when she slidesss it back with charisma.

C.R. (cont'd)

That's not fair. I'm still learning.

MIA

Aren't we all.

A **RUMBLE** from a few feet away, from...below the floor.

They exchange a concerned glance. Both RISE and move toward the RUMBLE until they hear a LOUD **THUMP**.

No one else in the restaurant seems to care. An everyday California 4 AM experience.

One of the floor tiles appears to MOVE.

MIA (cont'd)

This is new.

The tile FLIPS open. A **HOLE** in the floor of the In-N-Out.

C.R.

Well it certainly isn't paperwork.

A **HAND** reaches out and grasps onto the floor. But it can't get a grip.

Mia and C.R. exchange a "Are we doing this?" glance. Yes.

They work together to PULL the hand UP and FALL BACK, pulling the person attached to the hand completely out.

A DUST CLOUD rises from the disturbed floor.

When the dust clears, Mia and C.R. come face-to-face with Alivia Fournier.

Oh.

And the ghost of Hughes Landson.

MIA

You...You're the...

ALIVIA

(rapidly)

Hi there. Name's Alivia Fournier. I'm just kinda gonna assume that you two are the officers on my case given your stammering, in which case, yes, I just came out of the floor. It's been a long 48 hours, and it's not over yet. There's no reason to read my Miranda rights, as I'll let you arrest me *immediately* after we stop the terrorist plot about to occur. Got it?

MIA

Is that all?

ALIVIA

Oh. And say hi to the ghost of Hughes.

HUGHES

Hi there, I'm pleased to meet you all, thank you for working so hard on my case.

C.R. struggles to process this information but Mia has been ready for this moment since she became a cop.

MIA

Where do you need to go?

INT. POLICE CAR - EARLY EARLY EARLY [DRIVING]

The dark clouds above SWIRL in and out of each other.

Mia drives, Alivia in the passenger seat. C.R. looks to be processing the information in the back. Hughes talks to him.

HUGHES

I'm a ghost. You've seen movies, yes?

C.R.

I...You don't...I can't see.

HUGHES

(to Alivia and Mia)

I've reduced him to a blabbering idiot and I apologize sincerely for that.

MIA

He'll be fine.

ALIVIA

How are you dealing with this so well?

MIA

Somebody has to. Might as well be me.

Hughes smiles. Impressive. Then, a PAIN in his thigh. He tries to maintain the smile through a grimace.

MIA (cont'd)

Where are we going?

ALIVIA

You met Janice, I assume?

MIA

Your mom was savage to her when we had 'em all together.

ALIVIA

The fucking worst.

Mia looks at her--

MIA

I think get it.

ALIVIA

You do?

MIA
Sometimes it seems like violence is
the only option.

The women exchange a knowing smile.

MIA (cont'd)
I still have to arrest you, you know
the drill.

ALIVIA
Of course.

INT. JANICE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - EARLY EARLY EARLY MORNING

Janice looks at herself in the full-length mirror. It's dark in the room, but the bathroom light is on just enough for her to see to get dressed. And she's got a fuckin' FIT on. Flexes her arm muscles.

Her PHONE RINGS. Its a YG song.

Quickly scrambles to the **BATHROOM** and picks up--

JANICE
Liv?

INTERCUT B/N Alivia and Janice

ALIVIA
Hey, hey, hey girl.

JANICE
Are you not...? Whatever. I won't question it. Postal workers stay together forever, we don't SNITCH, boy.

Mia CHUCKLES, hearing Janice through the phone.

ALIVIA
Jan, I'm in police custody now, but I have a question.

JANICE
You need someone to break you out?

ALIVIA
(smiles)
Not yet. Do you have access to that fancy ass mail computer at home?

JANICE
Not since you set fire to my truck.

ALIVIA
Sorry about that.

JANICE
I could if I made it to HQ, but I don't have a car and the boo's asleep.

Alivia looks to Mia for confirmation? She nods.

ALIVIA
We'll pick you up.

INT. POLICE CAR - EARLY EARLY EARLY MORNING [PARKED]

Janice opens the back door--

JANICE
Hey guys!

ALL
Hiiii Janice.

She goes to sit but C.R. intervenes--

C.R.
No!

JANICE
Is there a problem?

HUGHES
(still invisible)
He's just making sure you don't sit on me.

JANICE
Cool, a ghost.

Everyone looks at her with mouth agape.

INT. POLICE CAR - EARLY EARLY EARLY MORNING [DRIVING]

Hughes's eyes display a feeling of concern we haven't seen yet.

He pulls up his sleeve and his hand is completely gone. Quickly covers it back as...

Alivia turns to Janice--

ALIVIA

We don't really have time to waste,
so we need as many computers going at
the same time as possible.

JANICE

What are you trying to do on them?

ALIVIA

We need to intercept roughly seven
hundred packages filled with a
dangerous chemical before they get
delivered to their destinations.

MIA

That's doable, right?

JANICE

Well it would be if deliveries didn't
start in 15 minutes.

ALIVIA

Jesus fuck, WHY do you have to be so
efficient!

Mia SPEEDS UP. Everyone is silent for a second.

EXT. MAIL HEADQUARTERS - MORNING

A seemingly endless circle of MAIL TRUCKS surrounding a
SHINING GLASS BUILDING. Like the White House of a world
where postal workers controlled the government, and did a
better job.

The clouds above swirl MADLY, like tornadoes are about to
erupt everywhere at once.

A police CAR **CAREENS** in, SCREEECCHING to a stop right
outside the circle.

All five people in the car step out, but Hughes is moving
slowly.

JANICE

Alright people, everybody to a truck,
we got five minutes and five people
to cancel 700 packages. I wasn't no
math major cuz I didn't go to
college, but that's 140 a person a
minute for you non-mailedictorians.

Mia, C.R, and Alivia each RUN to a truck and jump inside.

Hughes tries to JOG over but a STABBING PAIN in his legs TOPPLES him to his knees. He looks down and his legs are completely GONE. He lifts his shirt and everything below his belly button is just...air.

HUGHES

(mumbles)

You can't live forever, even in death.

Alivia notices his collapse right as she is getting in a truck. Comes to him--

ALIVIA

Hughes!

Mia, C.R., and Janice are all in place. Janice begins shouting out orders and the cops follow along--

JANICE

(shouting)

PRESS ON, AND GO TO FUTURE DELIVERIES. ONCE YOU'RE THERE, --

Alivia crouches over Hughes.

ALIVIA

No no no. This is not allowed.

More of his body DISAPPEARS with every passing moment. He has trouble speaking through the PAIN.

HUGHES

It's fine, I'm already dead. There's no point. Go.

Alivia's eyes TEAR UP as she stares in his eyes.

ALIVIA

You didn't tell me.

HUGHES

You didn't tell *me*.

She shakes her head.

Janice leans out from the mail truck she's in--

JANICE

Liv, which packages are we even canceling?

ALIVIA
Any package whose name seems even
vaguely male!

JANICE
We need you over here.

ALIVIA
I know!

Alivia turns back to Hughes, who is only a wispy HEAD.

ALIVIA (cont'd)
You wanna know why I killed you? I
didn't know what else I could do...
Fuck. I still don't fucking know.
But...it ain't this.

HUGHES
My...position...is...open for
applications.

Alivia smiles through the tears.

ALIVIA
You dumb bastard, still talking fancy
when he's just a head.

Janice shouts from the truck--

JANICE
Liv, we don't have any more time.

From the **CENTRAL GLASS BUILDING**,

*POSTAL WORKERS walk forward in SLOW MOTION in a straight
line toward the TRUCKS.*

JANICE (cont'd)
(under her breath)
The mailedictorians.

Mia, C.R., and Janice jump out of their vehicles and a
HEROIC POSTAL WORKER takes each of their places without even
acknowledging them.

All of the LIGHTS turn on at once, and each mail truck
drives out SIMULTANEOUSLY.

Alivia smiles through tears as the last of Hughes's HEAD
disappears, leaving her kneeling over NOTHING.

LUCY
I'm gooooooddd. Have you heard my new
elephant joke?

ALIVIA
What is it?

LUCY
I said have you *herd* it?

Lucy smiles.

ALIVIA
I don't think you know what a joke is
sweetie. Can you put my dad on the
phone?

Lucy gives the phone to Dad.

DAD
I couldn't hear what you responded,
did you get it?

ALIVIA
(laughs)
I think I got it. Where's mom?

DAD
She didn't wanna come visit you, so I
told her she'd have to come *visit* the
house from now on.

Alivia raises one eyebrow.

ALIVIA
Good.

DAD
Only five more years, ya know.
Snitches don't get stitches. They get
reduced sentences.

Alivia SNORTS. Silly ass joke.

ALIVIA
Dad?

DAD
Yeah, hun?

ALIVIA
Yesterday, I got to teach Vonnegut
for the first time...

(MORE)

ALIVIA (cont'd)
(sighs)
Figures this is where I get my job.

DAD
For what it's worth? I'm proud of
you, sweetie.

MOVE RIGHT ONE STALL to see

WAITS and SUSAN looking **PISSED** in jail uniforms. They try to
share the phone. Each rips the phone away from each other.

Tessa sits on the other side, watching the two FIGHT.

Waits snatches the phone--

WAITS
How many of those fuckers did we get?

TESSA
Not a single one, I'm afraid.

Susan grabs the phone--

SUSAN
All of my hard work and we didn't
kill a single--

WAITS
Your hard work?

They FIGHT for the phone again.

TESSA
Guys!

They stop and listen.

TESSA (cont'd)
Some of the packages didn't get to
their destinations. But the rest of
them? Misogynist men just don't
engage in self care enough to apply a
free product. The patriarchy strikes
again.

Susan and Waits look at each other.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

C.R. watches from a distance as Mia stands beside the captain, waving at an assembled crowd of adoring onlookers. Sips a GREEN SMOOTHIE.

Mia leans into the captain's ear and *whispers*--

MIA
I'm gonna take your job, eventually,
you *fuck*. I have help now.

She leans back, and shakes his hand.

Her phone RINGS. Slyly looks at it: "NONONONONONO."

Looks back at C.R.

He holds up ANOTHER GREEN SMOOTHIE in his left hand while sipping with his right.

She SMILES.

JANICE (PRE-LAP)
Speaking of sauce...you heard that
new YG?

EXT. NEW MAIL TRUCK - DAY

Janice poses the question to a TEENAGE GIRL.

TEENAGE GIRL
Love it. What mixtape's your fav?

Janice's face LIGHTS UP.

FADE OUT