

THE HEARTLAND

"PILOT"

Written by

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COLD OPEN

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - MADISON AVE. - MORNING

An ELECTRIC SCOOTER whisks through hustling pedestrians.

On it: CONNER HART -- 30's, confident, boyishly handsome and eternally optimistic.

He wears designer business attire and a friendly smile.

CONNER (V.O.)
My name is Conner Hart. You don't
know me -- but I've changed your life.

He passes a cafe...

CONNER (V.O.)
I've made you think.

...a DINER looks up with a TEAR IN HER EYE...

CONNER (V.O.)
I've made you laugh.

...a COUPLE at the corner GIGGLE as they stare upward....

CONNER (V.O.)
I've made you hungry.

...a MAN at the bus stop IGNORES THE BUS to run into a bodega...

CONNER (V.O.)
I might've even saved your life.

...A TEEN looks questioningly at her VAPE PEN...

CONNER (V.O.)
I know what you're thinking.
But no -- I'm not God.

He zips around a corner...

CONNER (V.O.)
I'm an Ad Man.

REVEAL ADVERTISEMENTS:

Diner's POV: *CAREER-IN-NURSING* on her tablet.

Couple's POV: *GOOFY MONKEYS IN JEANS* on a billboard.

Man's POV: *DELECTABLE EGG SANDWICH* covers the side of the bus.

Teen's POV: *GRUESOME BLACK LUNG* on her phone.

SUDDENLY: Conner screeches to a halt.

CONNER (V.O.)
Or at least -- I was.

Reveal: ROWDY PROTESTERS block a skyscraper's entrance.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH RISE - CORNER OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Conner and boss JENNIFER (40's, chic) in her plush office.

On a huge screen: a LAUNDRY DETERGENT AD

Pictured: An ALL-WHITE ROOM with BLONDE CAUCASIAN FAMILY in WHITE BATH ROBES. Words sprawled above: *THE POWER OF WHITE*.

CONNER
(pleading)
It's clearly about washing whites,
not white... washing.

Jennifer clicks a remote, flipping through WEBSITES...

JENNIFER
Our agency is trending on Twitter,
Facebook, Insta and TikTok.

On screen: TikToks of CAUCASIAN TEENS with crew cuts proudly dumping the advertised laundry detergent onto American flags.

CONNER
(playful)
Let's hope those colors really
don't bleed, right?

She's stoic.

CONNER (CONT'D)
Yup -- too soon.

JENNIFER
You're the best young exec I've got,
Conner. But the partners are calling
for a head and you were the lead.

CONNER
No! Not now! I have the wedding
coming up and...

JENNIFER
I know. I feel bad for Jasmine,
too.

CONNER
Can you set me up somewhere? I
heard Olgivy is looking --

JENNIFER
Well, my cousin has a...
(*how can I say this*)
boutique... ad shop out of state --

CONNER
No way. We can't leave New York.

JENNIFER
You may be short on options here,
Conner.

She clicks to NYPOST.COM:

GREAT WHITE NOPE!
Junior Creative Director's Racist ad rocks NYC

Pictured: Conner on sailboat with a baby blue sweatshirt
looped around his neck.

CONNER
Oh, come on -- I know they have a
photo of me with Drake at the Garden.

A beat and he concedes. Turns to Jennifer...

CONNER (CONT'D)
How far out of state?

SMASH TO:

EXT. IOWA LANDSCAPE - DAY

Silence. Stillness.

A one-lane freeway splits valleys of corn fields as far as
the eye can see.

Title appears: "*The Heartland*"

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE**EXT. RURAL TOWN - SUNRISE**

Conner strides by small shops in a trendy suit and tie -- a striking contrast to the locals.

On his iPhone:

JASMINE (VOICE MAIL)
It's Jaz -- leave a message!

BEEP.

CONNER
Here we go! First day!

He surveys the town...

CONNER (CONT'D)
It's not bad here. I think you might --

An ANGRY PASSERBY YELLS at a random TEENAGE GIRL...

PASSERBY
Cover your knees, trollop!

Conner reconsiders...

CONNER
-- well, maybe not like it... but
we won't be here long anyway. Call
me when you arrive. Love you!

END CALL. He's arrived: "STAR ADVERTISING" -- a small brick office building from the early 1900's.

He takes it in... and enters:

INT. STAR ADVERTISING - WAITING ROOM

1970's decor. Cubicles. Walls lined with framed ads for mattress shops, farm supply stores, used car lots...

RED (O.S.)
I told you we weren't Madison
Avenue.

REVEAL: "RED" (50's, kind-eyed, burly) sporting a flannel button-up, a bushy white beard, and a country timbre.

CONNER
Don't be modest, Red. It's got...
heart.

Red smiles big and extends for a shake.

RED
Jennifer said you were charming!

He redirects his hand to SQUEEZE CONNER'S PECS.

RED (CONT'D)
But no more city folk suckling from
these teats -- you're our hot-shot
creative now!

Conner tries to play along...

CONNER
That's right -- your cousin didn't
completely suck me dry!

Bad phrasing. But only Conner heard it.

RED
(shouts)
Morning meeting, everyone!

Red drags Conner to the center of the bullpen, displaying him
to a DOZEN MID-WESTERNERS assembling...

VOICE FROM CROWD (O.S.)
Is there a new dress code?

RED
Only one announcement today! Please
welcome our new creative director:
Conner Hart.

VOICE FROM CROWD (O.S.)
What about Dick?

RED
Right -- two announcements...
our previous Creative Director
Dick White is now our receptionist.

REVEAL: To Conner's left -- DICK WHITE (40's) stands GLUMLY.

Awkward.

RED (CONT'D)
Conner was available thanks to his
big screw-up in New York.

THE CROWD BUZZES.

Even more awkward.

RED (CONT'D)
 (to Conner)
 Introduce yourself, son.

Conner shakes off the rough start, pulls out notecards, confidently addresses the crowd...

CONNER
 Some say advertising is a business
 of manipulation. But I say it's a
 business of inspiration.

He pauses for reactions.

Blank stares.

VOICE FROM CROWD (O.S.)
 We want Dick back!

RED
 Settle down!

CONNER
 It's ok; I'm sure you all like Dick --

VOICE FROM CROWD (O.S.)
You like dick!

Red steps in front of Conner.

RED
 Let's move on.

CONNER
 (re: note cards)
 I spent all week on this.

RED
 Public speaking can be hard.

That stings.

RED (CONT'D)
 Meeting dismissed! Oh -- and
 there's cake in the break room for
 Dick's birthday.

Conner wants a do-over. But it could be worse:

INT. BREAK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A CAKE that reads: "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DICK!"

TRAVIS (40's, Black, boisterous fast-talker) breaks from the group of workers to corner Conner.

KIKI (30's, Native descent, timid) trails with plate of cake.

TRAVIS
I'm Travis -- Penny's Pet Palace,
Linda's Nail Boutique, Jan's Hair
Emporium. And this is our junior rep --

Kiki extends a hand but:
SPLAT! Her CAKE FALLS on Conner's DESIGNER LOAFERS.

KIKI
Oh God! I'm sorry!

TRAVIS
Kiki -- Those are like sixty dollar
shoes, ya ding-dong!

CONNER
More like three --

Spies Kiki's angst...

CONNER (CONT'D)
-- dollars. Three dollars... tops.

He leans to clean up. Kiki helps.

KIKI
Again -- so sorry.

CONNER
Don't be. I once dropped an entire
shrimp cocktail at a Jay-Z brunch.

KIKI
Did Beyonce see?

CONNER
I kicked all the shrimp under the
banquet table -- Queen Bee was
none-the-wiser.

She chuckles, *already smitten*.

They rise. Travis yanks PALOMA over (Late 30's, Latina, consummate professional).

TRAVIS
And this is our senior account rep
Paloma. First in sales every month!

She TYPES VIGOROUSLY on her phone, uninterested.

Conner waits.

More typing.

Conner turns back to Travis:

CONNER
I look forward to meeting her.

KIKI SNORT-LAUGHS and:
SPLAT! Her CAKE is back on Conner's shoes.

I'm -- KIKI Don't be. CONNER (CONT'D)

CUT TO:

INT. MEN'S RESTROOM - MINUTES LATER

A frosting-drenched towel drops into the trash.

Conner steps to a URINAL.

OUT OF NOWHERE: CHIP (40's, Caucasian, strapping) at the urinal next to him.

CHIP
You know what's different here in
the Midwest?

CONNER
You talk at urinals?

CHIP
While you New York pansies drink Old
Fashions and fondle your skinny-ties,
we're out here doing real work.

CONNER
Actually we're back to "narrow"
ties -- the standard is 3 inches...

CHIP
Only three-inches?

Chip PEERS over the divider -- *not* at Conner's tie.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Whoa, check that out!

CONNER DESPERATELY CONTORTS his body, mid-stream.

CHIP (CONT'D)
What'd those shoes run you?
Seventy... eighty dollars?

Chip CACKLES, SLAPS Conner's back.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Relax -- I don't want to see your
puny pecker, Connie.

Chip OFFERS HIS HAND over the divider.

CHIP (CONT'D)
I'm Chip -- Sales Manager.

Conner doesn't reciprocate.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Your new supervisor.

Well shit. Conner reluctantly shakes his hand.

CONNER
Pleasure.

CHIP
All mine.

Chip zips up and heads straight to the door.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Don't mess this gig up. Another
firing would be a real resume-killer.

CONNER
This job isn't going on my
resume... but I get your point.

CHIP
Good. Now report to my office --
time for your first assignment.

Chip exits past an entering EMPLOYEE and FARTS.

CHIP (CONT'D)
(to employee)
You hear what that asshole called you?

Chip GUFFAWS as the door SLAMS.

CONNER
(to the employee)
Is there an H-R department here?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**INT. STAR ADVERTISING - CHIP'S OFFICE - MORNING**

A small office with college football memorabilia, a family portrait, and a Donald Trump Chia-Pet.

Chip addresses Conner and Paloma.

PALOMA
Please just let me handle it!

CHIP
 Paloma -- Conner is doing creative
 for your clients now. Deal with it.

CONNER
 (reassuring)
 I'll be a quiet observer.

Chip points at Kiki passing the doorway...

CHIP
 And take that one.

She stops cold. *Me?*

CHIP (CONT'D)
 She needs to see what closing
 looks like.

Paloma groans.

PALOMA
 What am I going to do with a dim-
 witted millennial and a low-rent Don
 Draper?

Chip considers.

CHIP
 Sounds like a hot three-way to me.

Paloma's head drops. Conner is appalled.

CHIP (CONT'D)
 Don't forget these for the...
 (clicks his scissors)
 ...scissoring!

Conner quickly leads the women out.

CHIP (CONT'D)
 Wait -- I got more!

CONNER
 (hollers back)
 Good meeting! Thank you!

INT. DENTAL TREATMENT ROOM - LATER THAT MORNING

DR. KATE MADISON (50's, very gruff) scrapes a BOY'S teeth.

Paloma and Kiki pitch her. Conner fidgets with a faux mouth.

PALOMA
...so it's a hundred weekly rotators
plus college football on Saturday.

DR. MADISON
Red Wolves -- mount up!

PALOMA AND KIKI
WOOF-WOOF!

The outburst startles Conner. Dr. M clocks it...

DR. MADISON
Your himbo not into football?

PALOMA
That's our new creative guy --

KIKI
From Madison Avenue!

DR. MADISON
(impressed)
Madison Avenue?

CONNER
Hi, I'm --

PALOMA
(interjects)
-- only here for training purposes.
I have a commercial written.

Paloma pulls out A SCRIPT.

CONNER
Woah -- a commercial?!

Conner leans in like he's seeing an ancient scroll.

DR. MADISON
Something wrong?

Paloma glares -- *not another word, guy.*

Conner can't help himself...

CONNER
It's just -- the thing now is
creating experiences.

DR. MADISON
 (intrigued)
 I'm listening.

PALOMA
 (to Dr. Madison)
 Please don't.

Conner's energy rises, CREATIVITY possessing him...

CONNER
 We need to fundamentally change the
 perception of dentistry.

PALOMA
 This is dental work, not communism.

IT HITS HIM.

CONNER
 (to the boy)
 Hey, Kid! If you could fly -- but
only twice a year -- you'd never
 miss it, right?

The boy garbles *something like a yes.*

CONNER (CONT'D)
 (gesticulating)
 People fear coming to the dentist, but
 they shouldn't! It's a gift! A gift
 that only comes once every six months.

DR. MADISON
Four if the insurance is good.

CONNER
 Imagine -- a simulation: Residents
 come to a downtown pop-up where
 they lie in a dental chair...

Dr. Madison and Kiki are *hooked*. Paloma steams.

CONNER (CONT'D)
 Monitors activate -- three hundred
 and sixty degrees of view -- now...

His passion stimulates Dr. Madison and Kiki...

CONNER (CONT'D)
 -- they are floating gently above
 the town square.

The duo lean in -- temperature rising.

CONNER (CONT'D)
 Because Dr. Madison's dental
 cleanings are an escape -- delicate
 hands peeling away the plaque of
 your life.

Their heartbeats crest... His tone softens...

CONNER (CONT'D)
 And as you softly return to land,
 the new slogan appears --

KIKI
 Dentistry that's above it all!

Conner to Kiki: *perfect.*

Dr. Madison is *shook*. She wipes her brow.

DR. MADISON
 The twink got me. Where do I sign?

EXT. DENTAL OFFICE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Kiki and Conner burst out of the office and high-five.
 Paloma drags behind with a scowl.

KIKI
 I didn't know where you were going!

CONNER
 Neither did I!

KIKI
 And then --

CONNER
 The slogan! You nailed it!

KIKI
 It just flew out of my mouth!

CONNER
That, my friend is called inspiration.

PALOMA
 No -- That, asshole is called a disaster.

She **SHOVES THE CONTRACT** at Kiki.

PALOMA (CONT'D)
 Kiki -- read the production section.

KIKI
 "Client agrees to costs of nine
 hundred dollars..." Hey, that's
 great!

Conner's face says differently.

KIKI (CONT'D)
 "to begin..." Hey, that's tomorrow!

PALOMA
 You have nine hundred dollars and
 one day to make people fly so they'll
 change dentists -- great plan.

CONNER
 Costs tend to be a little higher
 for Augmented Reality...

PALOMA
 Well, welcome to "Reality Reality" --
 where businesses are owned by normal
 people with normal amounts of money.

Kiki's light dims. Conner can't have that...

CONNER
 I'll make it work.

PALOMA
 You'd better. She's a big client --

CONNER
 I promise!

PALOMA
 (storming off)
 I miss Dick.

A beat. And it hits Kiki:

KIKI
 Oh -- "You like dick." I totally
 get that now.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**INT. STAR ADVERTISING - CONFERENCE ROOM - NOON**

A GLASS WALL separates the modest room from the bullpen.

Kiki, Paloma, and videographer Griff (50's, gray hair, dad bod) sit around the table.

Dick collects emptied boxes of Chinese food.

Conner fires up a PORTABLE PROJECTOR...

CONNER
Here's what I've got. It's not V-R,
but it'll grab attention.

On screen: A MIRROR OF HIS IPHONE.

CLICK. Up pop hand-drawn storyboards: AN ELEGANT AND ARTISTIC DEPICTION OF MONITORS SURROUNDING A DENTAL CHAIR. A geometric pencil sketch that would make M.C. Escher proud.

GRIFF
(amazed)
How on Earth?

CONNER
(smug)
I took some art classes.

GRIFF
I meant the projection.

CONNER
(disappointed)
Oh -- Bluetooth.

GRIFF
(sotto)
Tools of the devil.

Conner proceeds...

CONNER
I found a bunch of C-R-T monitors
in the back. We'll take them to town
square and arrange them like so...

He zooms the image to the monitors. Then to the chair...

CONNER (CONT'D)
The visitor will sit here. Kiki --
any luck with that dental chair?

KIKI
Found one! It's in Newton.

CONNER
Is that far?

KIKI
Thirty minutes. Unless there's a tractor... then about two hours.

CONNER
Great. I'll rig the monitors into a video wall. Paloma, can you --

PALOMA
Nope.

CONNER
Kiki, can you get us a drone to capture footage for the monitors?

KIKI
Sure! What's a --

CONNER
Did you bring the music, Griff?

GRIFF
The full collection...

He dumps a box: CRUSTY CASSETTE TAPES and a cloud of dust.

GRIFF (CONT'D)
The rights expired but everyone involved is probably dead anyway.

Conner holds up a tape: *Commercial Riffs 113*. Then: through the glass he clocks a FENDER GUITAR in a CUBICLE.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAVIS' CUBICLE - MOMENTS LATER

TRAVIS
That's just for decoration.

Conner pleads from the cubicle entrance...

CONNER
We only need a gentle riff.

TRAVIS
Nah -- I gave up the axe in my twenties.

CONNER

Why?

TRAVIS

You ever realize you're not good enough at something and it's time to move on?

CONNER

(baffled)

No.

TRAVIS

Sales is more stable than gigging... and I meet a surprisingly similar amount of desperate middle-aged ladies.

CONNER

Travis -- when you have a creative gift, you don't hang it on the wall like some useless sports trophy.

Conner picks up the guitar.

CONNER (CONT'D)

Some say, "live your best life."
But I say, "live your best lives" --
the one you have, and the one you
dreamed of having.

A beat.

Sold. Travis snatches the guitar...

TRAVIS

Let's rock.

CONNER

(clarifies)

A gentle riff.

TRAVIS

Let's rock... softly.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conner bursts in with Travis.

CONNER

It's all coming together!

SILENT STARES from the room. Conner spots a new arrival...

CHIP

You think you can use my entire staff for your little fantasy project?

CONNER
But Chip --

CHIP
You were hired to do the creative,
Connie. So do all of it.

CONNER
What if Kiki --

A TUNE from Conner's phone -- Facetime from Jasmine.

CONNER (CONT'D)
(exiting)
I have to take this.

Chip: *Did he just walk out on me?*

Kiki: *Did he just mention me?*

INT. BULLPEN - BY THE CONFERENCE ROOM GLASS

On phone: JASMINE (20's) wearing a ROBE and GLITTERY MAKE-UP.
She's a big-city stunner and a fully-lit firework.

JASMINE (ON PHONE)
Do I look like Laura Dern?

CONNER
(off-balance)
Oh -- are we doing the Wild at
Heart thing again?

JASMINE (ON PHONE)
No -- Wanda busted her ankle, so...

She pulls the phone back...

REVEAL: The backstage of a CHAOTIC PLAY REHEARSAL.

JASMINE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
...you're looking at the new lead
of the Jurassic Park musical!

Behind Conner, through the GLASS WALL:
HER FACE ALSO APPEARS ON THE PROJECTOR SCREEN.

Conner's Bluetooth is STILL CONNECTED!

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

CONNER (ON SCREEN)
I thought you gave up the
understudy role.

JASMINE (ON SCREEN)
Thank God I didn't, right?

Kiki reaches to shut off the projector. Chip grabs her hand...

CHIP
(wryly)
Let's see where this goes.

INT. BULLPEN

JASMINE (ON PHONE)
But I only have two days to learn
all the choreography.

CONNER
And then you'll be here?

JASMINE (ON PHONE)
Then the show starts. So I figured
maybe I wouldn't come... at all.

That stings.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

Chip BELLOWS with glee.

Paloma reopens the CHINESE FOOD, lounges like she's at a movie.

Kiki covers her ears.

JASMINE (ON SCREEN)
It's not a big deal. You said
yourself you'll be back soon.

INT. BULLPEN

CONNER
Technically I said "we", but --

On screen: JAMES, A BUFF MALE ASSISTANT joins Jasmine.

Suddenly: HE PULLS OFF HER ROBE, revealing NAKED BREASTS!

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

GASPS!

KIKI's hands go from ears to eyes. Chip snaps a pic.

CONNER (ON SCREEN)
 Woah -- is that guy union?

On screen: JAMES applies a pasty to JASMINE'S right nipple.

INT. BULLPEN

JASMINE (ON PHONE)
 Ellie is a stripper in this
 version. Paleobotanist wasn't sexy
 enough for Broadway.

CONNER
 There are so many things wrong with
 that sentence.

JAMES (ON PHONE)
 (to Jasmine)
 I didn't know you had a boyfriend.

CONNER
 (clarifies)
 Fiancé.

The pasty won't stick so James CUPS THE BREAST with his left
 hand and SOFTLY MASSAGES it on with his right.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

KIKI gags.

GRIFF
 Tools of the devil.

JAMES (ON SCREEN)
 Give me a hand here, guy.

On screen: A BUFF SHIRTLESS MAN starts working the OTHER BREAST.

SHIRTLESS MAN (ON SCREEN)
 (to Jasmine)
 I didn't know you had a boyfriend.

INT. BULLPEN

CONNER
 (clarifies)
 Fiancé.

On screen: A STAGE MANAGER pulls her toward stage.

STAGE MANAGER (ON PHONE)
 Chorus line is waiting, sweetie.

JASMINE (ON PHONE)
I have to go! We'll finish this
talk later...

On screen: The STAGE MANAGER YANKS the PHONE from her and
AIMS it at A DOZEN SHIRTLESS MEN.

STAGE MANAGER (ON PHONE)
Dino Dancers -- say goodbye to
Jaz's boyfriend.

DINO DANCERS (ON PHONE)
Bye!

CONNER
(shouts at dancers)
Fiancé!

Screen goes black. So does Conner's heart.

But he can't let the others see. Gotta be business as usual...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conner enters. Senses a new vibe.

Chip is beaming. He puts his hand on Conner's shoulder.

CHIP
Conner -- take the whole team. I'm
going home. My day has peaked.

CONNER
Really? I can do the project?

Griff, Paloma and Travis follow Chip out.

PALOMA
Best presentation ever.

TRAVIS
(to Conner)
I'm here for you if you ever need
someone to talk to, man.

Dick passes last... looks at Conner for the first time... lips
curl to a smile... then off he goes.

Conner is blown away. Momentum is back!

CONNER
(to Kiki)
I think I'm growing on them!

Kiki musters a polite *thumbs up*.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - AFTERNOON**

Conner and Paloma arrive, survey the scene:

Griff stacks CRT MONITORS -- *good*.
 Kiki drags the DENTAL CHAIR into place -- *perfect*.
 And a PILOT inflates a massive HOT AIR BALLOON -- *huh?*

Kiki runs up to Conner.

KIKI
 I couldn't find a drone...

CONNER
 So the balloon?

KIKI
 ...is another thing that flies!

Griff loads a clunky camera and tripod in the balloon's basket.

PALOMA
 This is...

CONNER
Awesome!

Conner is exuberant! Kiki rejoices!

PALOMA
 Are you two nuts?

He's already at the balloon...

CONNER
 Griff -- This is the shot they'll
 remember you for!

GRIFF
 (exits basket)
 Not me. I'm claustrophobic and
 scared of heights.

The lack of enthusiasm confounds Conner.

KIKI
 (to Conner)
 Could it be the shot they
 remember you for?

A smile. Then: he steps into the basket and extends a hand...

CONNER
How about... us?

Kiki can barely hide the goosebumps as she boards.

Across the way...

A SMALL CROWD has gathered to watch, including TWO COPS. The town square hasn't seen commotion like this in a long time.

OFFICER DONNY
Do they need a permit for this?

OFFICER JIMMY
Jesus, Donny. What do you want next -- permits for breathing?

Back at the balloon...

CONNER
(looking through viewfinder)
I can't see anything.

Griff steps in, smacks the side of the camera. Fixed.

CONNER (CONT'D)
Got picture. But also got a bogey.

Conner leaves the basket.

BALLOON PILOT
Bathroom is behind the hall.

CONNER
No -- that kid's kite.
(points to the offender)
It'll mess with the continuity.

Conner rushes the LITTLE GIRL WITH KITE.

CONNER (CONT'D)
Excuse me! Could you land your --

FACEPLANT! He TRIPPED over the TIE-DOWN ROPE.

Conner brushes dirt from his eyes.

GRIFF (O.S.)
Help!

REVEAL: The BALLOON five feet in the air! Griff and Kiki ALONE IN THE BASKET! The trip RELEASED A TIE-DOWN!

EVERYONE PANICS. GRIFF is HYSTERICAL.

GRIFF (CONT'D)
Get us down!

Conner GRASPS at the rope. The pilot yells:

BALLOON PILOT
Pull the cable on the left!

Kiki PULLS it -- a BLAST OF FIRE and MORE ALTITUDE!

Pressure mounts on the last tie-down.

BALLOON PILOT (CONT'D)
No -- my left!

KIKI
That was your left!

She pulls the other one -- HEAVIER FIRE! ANOTHER JOLT!

The remaining tie-down SNAPS! The BALLOON ROCKETS UPWARD.

GRIFF
I'm going to die!

The CROWD GASPS. A moment of chaos until...

The balloon SLOWS TO A HOVER a hundred feet off the ground.

Calmness. A beat. Then Griff VOMITS over the side...

SPLASH! Right in front of Paloma and Conner.

BALLOON PILOT
(points to pool of vomit)
So that's a bogey, right?

The COPS are on-scene and radio for a firetruck.

CONNER
(sheepishly to Paloma)
Take two?

Off Paloma's DEATH STARE.

INT. STAR ADVERTISING - BULLPEN - LATE AFTERNOON

An engraver attaches a *Conner Hart* nameplate to an office door. Conner sits in the bullpen, somberly staring at it.

Chip -- called back to work -- passes by...

CHIP
(to engraver)
Hope you got paid in advance, buddy.

Red approaches Conner.

RED
 Pal, you look like you just saw a
 hot-dish without tater tots.

Off Conner's wrinkled brow:

RED (CONT'D)
 That's a bad hot-dish.

CONNER
 Well, it's going to take a lot of
 tots to save the Dr. Madison account.

RED
 I heard all about it. She's on her way
 here to give us a piece of her mind.

Red sits to console his wounded lamb...

RED (CONT'D)
 Conner, do you know why people in
 town go to Dr. Madison?

CONNER
 Probably not her bedside manner.

RED
 Because she's in the P-T-A...
 Because her office is three blocks
 from their house... Because
 "Madison" comes before "Thompson"
 in the phone book.

CONNER
 (stung)
 You still use phone books?

RED
 What I'm saying is -- a commercial
 during the local news or an ad in the
 Pennysaver; who knows if these truly
 get Dr. Madison more customers.

Conner's eyes bug: *Ad men don't say that out loud!*

RED (CONT'D)
 But what it does get her is a moment
 in the spotlight... a celebration of
 her entrepreneurship... something to
 show her grandkids one day.

Conner looks inward... and it lands.

CONNER
 Art galleries rotate installations
 each season. But a cheap family
 portrait hangs for generations!

RED
 Now you're getting it...
 (unsure of the analogy)
 I think.

They rise.

RED (CONT'D)
 Now go into that conference room,
 take your lickin', and next time --
 keep it simple.

Conner nods, steps to the new name plate to take it in.

RED (CONT'D)
 You can move in tomorrow. We have a
 few more things to... clear out.

Through the office glass: DICK STANDS IN DARKNESS surrounded
 by boxes. He SLOWLY CLOSES THE BLINDS.

Off Conner's cringe.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dr. Madison at the head of the table, STEAMING. Red, Chip,
 Paloma and Conner on the sides, taking the lashing.

DR. MADISON
 My business survived a war, three
 recessions and a pandemic. But what
 you morons did this afternoon --

CONNER
 (politely)
 You know, the thing about publicity --

DR. MADISON
 My grandson was pulled from class
 because City Hall declared me a
 terrorist threat!

Whoops.

CHIP
 (stands)
 Dr. Madison -- this was my fault.

Conner is shook. *Chip taking the bullet?*

CHIP (CONT'D)
I sent Conner to your office. He's
 a big-city guy with terrible ideas
 who hurt you and destroyed your
 business because of how terrible he
 is. Like I said -- all my fault.

What a guy.

DR. MADISON
I appreciate the humility --
especially from a champion Red Wolf...

ALL EXCEPT CONNER
WOOF WOOF!

DR. MADISON
...but obviously I'm cancelling my
contract. And suing for damages.

PALOMA
What can we do to make this right?
Anything? Red?

All eyes on Red. He takes a breath, ready with some wisdom...

Kiki BARGES IN:

KIKI
Wait!

Off silent stares...

KIKI (CONT'D)
Sorry -- was nobody talking? I
thought someone would be mid-
sentence or something.

RED
How can we help you, Kiki?

She steps in, Griff follows pushing a TV/VHS combo cart.

KIKI
We have a commercial for Dr. Madison!

Off confused looks...

KIKI (CONT'D)
When the balloon went up, I pressed
the red button on the camera --

CHIP
To stop the balloon? What an idiot!

KIKI
No... to start the camera -- in
case it was our only chance.

Conner is concerned where this is going...

CONNER
Kiki, you don't have to --

KIKI
So Griff and I mixed in some stock
footage and we got... something.

Griff hits PLAY. Conner holds his breath...

ON SCREEN:

Chaotic, noisy stock footage of traffic, parks, airports.

KIKI (V.O.)
What if you could find peace, in an
unexpected place?

Then: fade to bright light and silence for a beat.

BAM -- A speeding roller coaster enters a dark tunnel.

KIKI (V.O.)
What if something you feared,
became your sanctuary?

Then: it reaches the same peaceful light.

KIKI (V.O.)
That's dental treatment when you're
in Dr. Madison's chair...

Zoom out from the light reveals: it's a dental lamp.

Gentle electric guitar music plays.

IN THE ROOM:

Kiki looks out the glass to make sure Travis is hearing his
music from the bullpen. He is... with a smile.

ON SCREEN:

Kiki's footage: The shot soars up and away from the dental
chair in a spectacular motion.

KIKI (V.O.)
Thirty minutes of bliss away from a
life of chaos...

The shot lands on townspeople looking up in amazement.

KIKI (V.O.)
It's dentistry that's above it all!

The kite floats into frame. A chyron with Dr. M's logo.

IN ROOM:

Conner in awe.

Dr. Madison leaps from her chair:

DR. MADISON
That's what I'm talking about!
 Add my picture to the end and get
 that on Wheel Of Fortune tonight!

CELEBRATION! Amongst the hand shakes and back slaps, Conner basks in Kiki's joy. She notices, returns a shy smile.

CONNER (V.O.)
 I was right -- This is a business
 of inspiration.

Sound fades away... the focus holds on Conner.

CONNER (V.O.)
 It just doesn't look the same on
 everyone.

Dr. Madison signs the contract -- Paloma's first smile.
 Red looks at Kiki -- flush with pride for his fledgling.

EXT. STAR OFFICES - PARKING LOT - SUNSET

CONNER (V.O.)
 For some, it's a spark. For some
 it's a never-ending burn...

Travis loads his guitar in the car -- happy it's coming home.
 Chip in his car, looking at his phone -- his face LIGHTS UP.

CONNER (V.O.)
 For others, it's something... else.

On Chip's phone: the pic of TOPLESS JASMINE.

INT. HOMEY LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Dr. Madison surrounded by extended family watching TV.

CONNER (V.O.)
 Whatever it is -- there's more of
 it out there than I ever knew.

On TV: Dr. M's commercial. The family cheers. She basks.

INT. CONNER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Unpacked boxes. Antique furnishings. The smell of old wood.

Conner dons his couture pajamas.

On his bed: two pillows. One sparkly with a bedazzled "J." He begins to move it to a box...

CONNER (V.O.)
This town will be good for me...

Then stops and optimistically returns it next to his.

CONNER (V.O.)
For us. A little time outside the
bubble...

He gets cozy.

CONNER (V.O.)
...away from the big city
pressure... away from the madness...

Now fully satisfied and ready to start anew!

CONNER (V.O.)
...there are worse ways to get your
bubble popped. This will be nice.

CLICK. The lamp off. The room dark.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - LATE NIGHT

POLICE LIGHTS. FRESHLY SCUFFED PARKED CARS. BUSTED SIDE-MIRRORS.

OFFICERS pull LIQUOR BOTTLES from an ESCALADE that's MASHED into a BUS-STOP BENCH.

On the curb: DONTE, a handsome COLLEGE ATHLETE flanked by SAM, a fit man in his 50's wearing a red polo shirt.

Donte SIGNS PAPERWORK for the COPS.

OFFICER DONNY
(flipping pages)
Here... here... and here. Oh, and
make that last one to Tommy.

REVEAL: The PAPERS are HEADSHOTS OF DONTE.

OFFICER DONNY (CONT'D)
Thanks, Donte! Go Red Wolves!

DONTE
(Slurring)
Wolllf-wolllf!

SAM
 (pulling Donte up)
 Alright, let's get you out of here.
 (to another cop)
 Thanks, Chief.

POLICE CHIEF
 Good luck Saturday.

FLASH! A steely COLLEGE STUDENT with PHONE CAMERA...

BETHANY
 Bethany from the new campus network
 "Bark With Bite." Why is our
 school's drunk quarterback not
 being arrested?

EVERYONE FREEZES and exchanges looks.

POLICE CHIEF
 Uh... no... he is. He is definitely
 getting arrested.

DONTE
 I am?

Chief motions to Donny -- who reluctantly cuffs Donte.

DONTE (CONT'D)
 Sam -- my draft stock!

Donte is led to a cruiser. Sam looks around desperately.

A TOW TRUCK pulls the Escalade from the bench to reveal:
 An ad for STAR ADVERTISING: "NEED A NEW IMAGE?"

Sam raises an eyebrow.

END OF SHOW